

Computing Educators Oral History Project

An Interview with *Amardeep Kahlon*

Conducted Tuesday, June 18, 2013

At Austin, Texas, USA

Interview conducted by Vicki L. Almstrum

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Context: A morning interview, with the interviewer and interviewee sitting across the breakfast table from one another in Amardeep's home in northwest Austin. Amardeep has prepared chai tea for both to drink.

1 [0:00]

2 **Vicki Almstrum: Good morning.**

3

4 Amardeep Kahlon: Good morning.

5

6 **V: This is an interview for the Computing Educators Oral History Project. Today's**
7 **interview is with Amardeep Kahlon, most recently of Austin Community College but on**
8 **her way to assume new responsibilities at BML University in Delhi, India. Today's date**
9 **is June 18, 2013. We are in Austin, Texas. Did I get all that information correct?**

10

11 A: Yes.

12

13 **V: Great. Well, it is great fun to be here with you and just before you embark on a**
14 **fantastic new adventure. But before we start to talk about that, I'd like to go way back.**

15

16 A: Sure.

17

18 **V: We like to begin these interviews with your childhood, even with you parents, their**
19 **backgrounds and how they've encouraged you. So would you like to tell us about your**
20 **family?**

21

22 A: Well, my fam ... I grew up in India. I was born in India. My father was in the military. My
23 grandfather was a lawyer. I lived mostly with my grandparents because my father was in the
24 military and ... where my grandparents lived there were very good schools. And I ... my
25 grandfather, like I said, was a lawyer. Not only was he a lawyer, he was the top lawyer in the
26 state. So education was a high priority. They always stressed education. You know, it was
27 interesting. They never stressed grades, but they stressed education. It was never like, "You
28 had to be at the top of your class. You have to be ranked number one." But, "You have to get
29 an education."

30

31 And my mother was a professional. She was in the field of education. In fact she retired as
32 the director of adult education for the state of Punjab, where she lived — where we lived.
33 And my father was also a lawyer but he joined the military. And I don't know if he actually
34 practiced law in the military, if he was in the JAG branch or not, but I do know that his legal
35 expertise was called on from time to time. And he retired a colonel from the military.

36

37 I have one younger sibling and he used to live in Austin, but then he moved around the world
38 and ultimately was the chief financial officer of an American company — very well
39 accomplished — and he's now taking care of my parents in India. He's ...

40

41 **V: So which city was it?**

42

43 A: This was in the city of Chandigarh.

44

45 **V: In Punjab?**

46

47 A: In ... it's actually the capital of Punjab. It doesn't belong to any state. It's what is called a
48 union territory, just like we have Washington, DC here ...

49

50 **V: How is that city spelled?**

51

52 A: It's C-h-a-n-d-i-g-a-r-h.

53

54 **V: Thank you.**

55

56 A: Yeah. And it was a very ... if I can digress a bit and talk about the city. It was a revolution of
57 its kind in India because it was designed by Le Corbusier, who designed cities all across the
58 world. A very well planned city. Most cities in India — I don't know if you've travelled to
59 India — but most cities in India are not well planned. It's very difficult to navigate cities.

60 This city is like a checkerboard. All north-south roads are parallel to each other, all east-west

61 roads are parallel to each other, so you can never really get lost. If you miss your turn, you
62 just go to the next turn, take a left, take another left, and you're back.

63
64 So ... and it's also a hub of education. It has several medical colleges, not one. Several
65 engineering colleges. College of architecture. Amazing number of just ... undergraduate
66 degree-granting colleges. And in India you have different levels of universities. So there's a
67 central university there, which is one of the best levels of universities, and just like we have
68 tier 1 et cetera here {in the United States}. And that university is Punjab University, P-u-n-j-
69 a-b University. And I graduated with my Master's, with my post-graduate ... post-undergrad
70 degrees, from there.

71
72 You know, that's another thing that's there, for education: number of schools K through 12.
73 Amazing number of good schools. I went to a parochial school, which was run by the Sisters
74 of Order of the Carmelite. It was a very prestigious school in Chandigarh, a private school,
75 which is why my command of English is very different from many other Indians you might
76 meet, is because of that school. And because English was always spoken in our house. It was
77 one of the very ... mostly we spoke English. We spoke Punjabi. But never Hindi, although I
78 know Hindi very well.

79 [5:10]

80 **V: Interesting. So you didn't move around as a child?**

81
82 A: No, I didn't. I moved once to go where my father was posted, but that was for one year in
83 fourth grade. But I still remember that, because it was very nice. But even then, when I
84 moved in that one year, the school that I was talking about, parochial school, it was Carmel
85 Convent School — C-a-r-m-e-l. For that one year when we moved, I remember, my parents,
86 a big discussion with them was what school they were going to send me to and they picked
87 Loretto Convent — L-o-r-e-t-t-o, Loretto Convent — which was the best school in that city. I
88 don't know if that was, in hindsight ... if that was important or not, but I think that gave me
89 an edge up in confidence, in the way I speak, in the way I'm able to carry on conversations,
90 and in my zest for learning.

91
92 **V: Interesting.**

93
94 A: So education was always emphasized. Values were always emphasized. In fact, my father
95 used to always say that, "Better than telling the truth is truthful living." And so that was very
96 highly emphasized in my family. In fact, when I moved to the US one of the pieces of advice
97 my mother gave me was, "Make sure you have a job. Make sure you are always independent
98 all your life". She said, "If you are earning, nobody can abuse you." So, and when she said
99 "nobody," she didn't just mean spouse, she meant anybody in the world.

100

101 **V: Right. OK. And your grandparents had a big role in raising you as well.**

102

103 A: Yes. And my grandmother, interestingly, was completely uneducated. So she valued
104 education.

105

106 **V: So she did not attend school at all?**

107
108 A: No, never. Never. But she died when I was very young. But she valued education completely.
109 She was ... her thing was, "All my kids are going to be educated. And my grandkids are
110 going to be educated, even more than the kids." Which was interesting. And my grandfather
111 was very well educated, who I lived with. In fact he has an interesting story in that he lived in
112 a one-room house in a rural village with his family. In fact, the house was so small that the
113 buffalo slept in one corner of the room and the rest of the family slept in the rest of the room.
114 And he decided that he didn't want to live that way the rest of his life and he branched out.
115 And he would walk something like three to five miles a day sometimes to go attend school
116 and college. And then he left the state to go attend law school. And that's how he became a
117 lawyer. His law practice was a thriving practice. And then he moved to the city.

118
119 **V: These were the parents of your ... ?**

120
121 A: My mother.

122
123 **V: Of your mother.**

124
125 A: My mother. Right.

126
127 **V: Right.**

128
129 A: My father's parents, they lived in the village. And they were both ... my grandfather was
130 educated a little bit, but my grandmother was completely uneducated. Yet they valued
131 education very much and they educated all four of their sons. And all four sons retired in
132 high positions from the military. My father went on to — after he retired from the military —
133 he went on to have a thriving law practice after that, a private practice, because he was a
134 lawyer. So education was valued on both sides. I find the same thing with me, with my kids. I
135 want them to get an education. Do I want them to be in the top 10% of the class? I don't care.
136 It's not important to me. The rank is not important to me.

137
138 **V: Mmm hmm. So thinking back to your years in school are there any particularly**
139 **significant opportunities or teachers that come to mind as being foundational in who**
140 **you've become as an educator?**

141 [9:41]

142 A: You know, there was one teacher. At that time we hated her, you know, because she was
143 Attila the Hun. But — in fact I'm friends with her 'til today. She was amazing, just amazing.
144 She was in my school. And she lives in Irvine, California now. She was very strict. But one
145 of the things she did was: she never let up on us. It was her way or the highway. But what
146 that did in us was ... that inspired us in a strange way. She has — even 'til today — she has
147 students whom she taught who just are fans of hers and they want to still keep in touch with
148 her. In fact, I went to California in April and I met with her, we had dinner together at my
149 cousin's house. It just happens that her daughter is my cousin's best friend too. She also
150 happened to be my aunt's neighbor. See, the town I lived in was a very small town.
151 Everybody knew each other. So she was my cousin's best friend when I was growing up and
152 now her daughter is my other cousin's best friend. She was very inspiring.

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V: What is her name?

A: Parminder P-a-r-m-i-n-d-e-r. And her last name is Irvine I-r-v-i-n-e.

V: And what grades were you in?

A: Uhm, seventh and eighth grade she was my teacher. And she was amazing. Very positive — but very strict. Very inspiring.

V: Which ...

A: She taught English.

V: OK.

A: And in fact, she recognized my potential for public speaking and she helped nurture it.

V: In what ways?

A: Because when I went on into college, I was a member of the debate club. I would often go back to her and seek guidance from her on how to go for my next tournament. What to do at my next tournament. Also, she taught us ways, like, “Hold your chin up.” “Put your shoulders back.” “Stick your chest out.” “That’s how you stand when you are speaking.” Which was actually very unusual for India, because most schools at that time were telling girls to be submissive. You know, a girl didn’t stand with her chest sticking out. But she was very unusual. Very unusual. And very inspiring. And even still today, when I talk to her, I look at the posts she puts on Facebook, she’s just full of inspiration.

V: So in the school system were you in different facilities as you moved between levels? So after seventh and eighth grade did you move to a different place?

A: I changed to a different school after eighth grade. I just ... my mother was the principal of a school, so I went to her school. I hated it. Every minute of it. But ... you know, to date I don’t know the reasons why she pulled me out of that great school and took me to her school. But it worked out fine.

V: Was it more the school or more having your mother principal that you hated?

A: Both. Both. I hated both parts. And the school was very different from what I attended. It was a very conservative school. You couldn’t wear a skirt to school. You had to wear a full length pant. And ... you know ...

V: Salwar?

A: Yes.

199
200 **V: Yeah.**
201
202 A: Yes. I just didn't like it. Didn't like it at all.
203
204 **V: So it was more traditional Indian, perhaps?**
205
206 A: Very traditional Indian. And the school I was in was very western.
207
208 **V: Yes.**
209
210 A: So ... I just didn't like it. But ... it was fine.
211
212 **V: And so you continued there through grade twelve?**
213
214 A: Tenth grade. Tenth grade.
215
216 **V: Grade ten.**
217
218 A: It was ... at that time in India education didn't go 'til grade twelve.
219
220 **V: OK.**
221
222 A: It only went 'til tenth. And after that you went into something called Prep, a class called Prep
223 in college, which served the purpose of eleventh and twelfth grade. And then you went on
224 into a bachelor's degree.
225
226 **V: So was Prep held at a university?**
227
228 A: At a college.
229
230 **V: OK.**
231
232 A: So I went to a college that was very close to my house. It was a college just for women. And
233 so I went to that college and that's where I got involved in the debate club. And it was just
234 amazing, that experience. I was the secretary of the club. I went to so many different
235 tournaments, so ... and won so many awards. My favorite topics were when I spoke about
236 women's emancipation in India. And I spoke a lot about that. We went to what are called
237 Declamation contests. I went to debates. I went to contests that are called "Just A Minute."
238 Do you know what Just A Minutes are?
239
240 **V: Please tell us.**
241
242 A: They are called JAMs. Basically you are given a topic right on the spot. And you have to
243 speak. You can't say "Uhm". You can't say "Ahh". And you can't repeat anything. But you
244 have to speak for a minute. And it seems easy enough on the surface. It's not. It was really

245 difficult. Because at some point you'd end up saying "Ahh" and that's it. You were
246 disqualified immediately. So those are some of the things.

247 [15:21]

248 And Parminder nurtured that in me. Because she told me, she says, "You're an amazingly
249 strong public speaker. You need to do this." And I will always be grateful to her for that. And
250 my parents nurtured that in me as well. Although they didn't like me going out of town for
251 tournaments. They didn't like that at all. But they did nurture that in me. And my grandfather
252 also. And he would always say — he used to call me "Baby" — and he would say, "It's not
253 possible for Baby to go to a tournament and come back without a trophy." So ...

254

255 **V: So you were possibly better travelled than many of the other women who were your**
256 **age?**

257

258 A: Yes. Yes. Yes. And I continued that debate and ... even after my undergraduate degree,
259 when I moved to the university, I continued that and travelled again with that. Better traveled
260 means within India, to a couple of different cities?

261

262 **V: Yes.**

263

264 A: Yeah. And I was much more aware than many other women because I went to these
265 tournaments. And I went and spoke at these tournaments. Of course, that led to gossip as well
266 because these tournaments were co-ed.

267

268 **V: That's what I was going to ask!**

269

270 A: And so I would hang out with the guys. I was always a tomboy. Always. So ... even now at
271 parties I prefer to talk to the guys because we can talk about computers, and we can talk
272 about latest technology, as opposed to fashion and earrings — which I can't handle. And so
273 even at that time — {chuckles} I know! — even at that time, so I used to hang out with the
274 guys. So that led to some gossip like, "Oh, she's just a loose person." But, you know, my
275 parents didn't care. They said, "We know what you are."

276

277 **V: Yeah. They understood the truthful living.**

278

279 A: Right. Right. They said, "We know what you are." So ...

280

281 **V: Yes.**

282

283 A: So they were very encouraging.

284

285 **V: And your brother is how much younger?**

286

287 A: He is five years younger.

288

289 **V: And do you think that they encouraged the two of you equally or differently?**

290

291 A: Uhm. They encouraged the two of us equally. The only difference they showed between the
292 two of us was that he could stay out late at night with friends and I couldn't. But other than
293 that I never felt a difference. I never felt them say, "Well, women don't do this." And at that
294 time, when I was growing up, most girls in India were made to cook in the kitchen, so that
295 when they went to the in-laws' house — or as in India, as it was called, you know, the *next*
296 house. Or your *real* house, which my parents never referred to it that way — I was never
297 allowed to cook. I was told, "You just concentrate on your college" and "We have a maid to
298 cook. What do we pay the maid for?"

299
300 In fact, my grandfather was so particular about that. I remember being in the kitchen one day
301 and just tinkering around with the maid, and he said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Just
302 cooking." He said, "Get out. We pay the maid for that." So even ... and then my mother at
303 some point had this ... people talked to her and said, "Well, your daughter needs to learn
304 cooking." So she forced me to go to this cooking class. I still remember going to that class —
305 how old was I? I was twenty years old, maybe — and I remember telling the lady who was
306 holding it, "I'm only here because my mother forced me to come." But I still have the recipes
307 she taught then and I still sometimes use one or two of them. {chuckles}

308

309 **V: Did you have any favorite courses as you were going through the years?**

310

311 A: You know what? I loved my English literature course. We studied Shakespeare. In fact — in
312 college. In fact my friend and I (and she and I are still best of friends and she lives in Delhi),
313 we used to act out some of those plays between ourselves. But that was my favorite, the
314 English literature class. And I'll tell you why that was my favorite: because of the way
315 Parminder taught us English. It was amazing how she would stand in front of the class and
316 she could read a poem, not in a monotone but actually put passion into the poem. So I carried
317 that forward when I went into college and my undergraduate degree was in Economics and
318 English Literature, with honors in English literature. You know, and that was my favorite
319 class in college.

320 [19:59]

321 **V: So for outside activities we have debate.**

322

323 A: Mmm hmm.

324

325 **V: We have doing the plays with your friend.**

326

327 A: Well, it wasn't a play. It was just the two of us ...

328

329 **V: Reading together.**

330

331 A: ... reading together.

332

333 **V: Are there any other activities that you tended to do outside of school time?**

334

335 A: No, those pretty much kept me very busy. I don't recall doing anything else, no.

336

337 **V: So sports and such are not a part of the ...**

338

339 A: No, sports ... I mean, by the time you got to college, only if you were on the sports team.
340 And I tried out for the cricket team and I didn't make it and ... I always wanted to be on the
341 cricket team because it seemed so cool. You know, those girls seemed so cool who were on
342 the cricket team. But I didn't make it. And I'm sure they thought the other way when they
343 saw us bringing home trophies. I'm sure they thought we were cool. {chuckles}

344

345 **V: Yes. It's all in perspective.**

346

347 A: Mmm hmm.

348

349 **V: So we have talked about your early years. We have talked some about your parents and**
350 **their backgrounds. We've talked a little bit about your brother. Is there anything else to**
351 **add about your brother and his ... ?**

352

353 A: My brother — also again, like I said, my parents didn't emphasize grades — he got through
354 his classes just fine, but he always just passed. If you asked people at that time who was more
355 likely to succeed in life, they would have definitely pointed towards me, because I got the
356 better grades. I actually, in grade school, I got to skip two classes because I got such good
357 grades. So I skipped second grade and I skipped ... I think fifth or sixth grade, I forget.
358 Anyway.

359

360 But he turned out far, infinitely more successful than me professionally. He started out with
361 Dell, and then he moved to another company called Agility, then he moved to another
362 company. And he ended up — even with Dell he was CFO for a particular region and then he
363 was CFO for the supply chain for this company. And then he quit his job on his own terms to
364 go and look after my parents. I mean his job was to the order of, I am sure, half a million
365 dollars. I'm not ... I mean I don't know for a fact. But I'm positive something like half a
366 million dollars a year. And he just quit that cold turkey to go and look after my parents.
367 Because in India you don't put your parents in a nursing home. It's the ultimate shame on the
368 family. And I will to my dying day respect him for that because I'm sure that took a lot of
369 guts.

370

371 **V: Does he have a family?**

372

373 A: Yes, he has a wife. He has two sons. And the sons are in school; they are in India now. You
374 know, amazing, just an amazing decision. And just an amazing son and an amazing brother.
375 Because even after he was living abroad, which was since 2001, he and I, we talk almost
376 every other day on the phone. So it was very good; it's been very good. So I am very blessed
377 to have him as a sibling.

378

379 **V: What is his name?**

380

381 A: Manpreet. That's M-a-n-p-r-e-e-t {Grewal}.

382

383 **V: Very nice. That's quite a tribute, Amardeep.**

384

385 A: Yeah, thank you. So the one thing I want to add to my ... you know, when I'm talking about
386 debate, I'm talking about I was this fancy public speaker. All through my life, even when I
387 was shining in these debates, at the back of my head, there was this huge Imposter Syndrome
388 that has never left me 'til today. It's like, you know, "I'm not worthy of this." "Pretty soon
389 I'm going to fall on my face." I never did fall on my face, but I always felt like I was going
390 to.

391

392 **V: Do you have a notion of where that arose from?**

393

394 A: No. I have no ... I have tried to delve into it. And I have tried to seek the source of it,
395 because I figured if I sought the source I would be able to shake it.

396

397 **V: Yes.**

398

399 A: And I haven't been able to seek the source. And actually — let me say that I think it comes
400 from me being overly competitive with myself.

401

402 **V: Interesting. So ...**

403

404 A: With my own self.

405

406 **V: ... you're measuring against your expectations, do you think?**

407

408 A: Yes. My own expectations that ... or ... and also the other thing that always gets me is when
409 somebody praises me, saying, "Oh, you did well." I'm thinking, "They must be just saying
410 that. They couldn't actually like this."

411 [25:06]

412 **V: So you've said that you haven't been able to overcome it on the big level. Do you think**
413 **that you have strategies you've been able to use on a more local level ... {words from**
414 **the two overlaying one another}**

415

416 A: Yes, I deal with it ...

417

418 **V: ... in instances?**

419

420 A: ... I deal with it, you know, episode by episode. And I say, "I'm just going to power through
421 this and get through this. And I'll be fine. And I'll rise and I'll shine. And everything will be
422 fine." But then, when we get to the next episode, before that, going into it, I have this ... all
423 these feelings. Like going to this new job. I have these feelings. "They can't really like me. I
424 don't know why they picked me." So I was telling a colleague yesterday, I said ... he said,
425 "When do you start?" I said, "July 1st, morning." I said, "By evening I'll be falling flat on my
426 face." And I believe that inside me.

427

428 **V: Shall we pause and explain what this new job is ...**

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A: Yes ...

V: ... before we move on to the next part, since we've brought it up?

A: ... yes, unless you want to talk about something else.

V: No, I think it would be nice to talk about what the job is.

A: So ... I finished my doctorate in Education Administration in 2012. And since then I was looking for some areas of growth, although I love my job at Austin Community College. I teach computer science. But I was looking for some areas of growth and I was applying for assistant professor positions. But I was never happy applying for them because I did not want to start at the beginning again. I have been in higher ed. for twenty-some years and, you know, I didn't want to start at the beginning again. I didn't want to be at the bottom again, trying to work my way up.

In November of 2012 my mother got injured and I had to rush to India overnight. So I went there. And for a whole month it was really chaotic. My father was in the hospital. My mother was injured. My father has Parkinson's, my mother has Alzheimer's. I was dealing with both of them and trying to get some semblance of sanity. And at the end of one month I said, "OK, that's it. I am going to go to my friend in Delhi and spend five days with her."

So I did that and a friend of hers came over and we started talking. And after the friend left, she said, "Oh, I should have introduced you better because he is setting up a new university. Or helping to set up." So she sent him my CV and immediately there were two universities that wanted to interview me. So with one university I went through four levels of interview. And the founder had also helped found the very prestigious Indian School of Business, which is ranked number 20 on the *Financial Times* list. So he said, "You would be a good fit as deputy dean over there." I said, "Fine."

So I came back {to Austin} and no word from them. And suddenly they called me back and said, "We want you to come for an interview." So I went back to India for an interview. Well, you know, without giving many details — which I'd rather not say on audio — the interview didn't go well. It lasted 25 minutes after a 52-hour flight total, including ... which included a 20-hour layover in Hong Kong. The interview lasted 25 minutes.

But on the interview committee, one of the members was one who was setting up his own university. They are a prominent family in India. They are the largest manufacturers of two-wheelers in the world. He liked me apparently so much that he wanted to interview me for his university. So they interviewed me the next morning and offered me the job of dean of academics at this university, which is called BML Munjal, M-u-n-j-a-l. It's coming up in Gurgaon, India, which is a suburb of Delhi.

So I will be the dean of academics and it will be my job to look at curriculum, to take the university towards the engineering program and computer science program, towards ABET

475 accreditation. Also it will be my job to implement policy regarding academics and to enforce
476 the policies regarding academics. And I start on July 1st {2013}. And my current employer
477 has been amazing about it. They don't want to lose me so they had said, "If it doesn't work
478 out just come back. We'll take you back."

479
480 **V: That's fabulous.**

481
482 A: Yes. So that is the new job.

483 [29:51]

484 **V: Exciting! We will return to talk more about that process as we get further in the**
485 **interview. Shall we talk a little bit about why you've ended up moving towards**
486 **computer science? We've heard a lot about English, we've heard a little about**
487 **economics, but not much indication of why economics. University we haven't talked**
488 **much about. Shall we ... ?**

489
490 A: Let me talk about that. Economics because my mother was very convinced ... she knew I
491 liked English, but she said, "It's not going to give you a career." So she said, "You must do
492 economics because that will at least give you a chance to go into some sort of a career." At
493 first she really wanted me to be a doctor. You know, in India at that time you either had to be
494 an engineer or a doctor. But I chose neither, so she was a little disappointed with that, I think.

495
496 Then, when I went to the university, I did mass communication, which is journalism, which
497 is again a field towards a career. But as I was doing journalism I decided that I really, really
498 wanted to do business. So I did a degree in international business.

499
500 And the whole time I really was intrigued by this thing called a computer — because in India
501 there weren't many — and at that time, 1981 ... 1982 I finished my degree in international
502 business — and 1981 was when IBM introduced the PC. And we had just heard about it. I
503 had never seen a PC 'til I started working for this company. And I remember their computer
504 room had one PC and there was one guy who was allowed to operate it. And I was fascinated
505 by it. I thought, "Wow! This is amazing." It was a black and white monitor. And it was a
506 computer. But I never considered ... still never considered studying a computer. I wanted to
507 have one because it was it was fascinating.

508
509 And then I moved to the US and to Endicott, New York, which is the place of IBM. The only
510 jobs available there were in computing. So I said, "OK." I went to the university,
511 Binghamton University, and I asked them, I said, "So what are my options for studying?"
512 They said, "Well, you can do an MBA or you can do a Master's in computer science." I said,
513 "Oh! But I don't have a bachelor's." And they said, "You don't need a bachelor's. You can
514 do a Master's." And this was 1984. Of course today that same university would laugh at me
515 if I came in with a degree in journalism and said I want to do a Master's in computer science.

516
517 So I did. I did a Master's in computer science. The first two courses I took were disastrous. I
518 got an incomplete in one and I failed one. The reason was not because I wasn't good enough
519 at it, but because the US education system was so different from the Indian one that I just
520 dropped the ball completely. So now what to do? Should I continue in computer science or

521 should I move somewhere else? I said, “Nope, I’m just going to continue.” So I got a degree
522 in computer science. While studying there I worked at IBM for some time. Then I took two
523 years off when my son was born in 1988. In 1990 I went back to Broome Community
524 College and became a professor of computer science there.
525

526 **V: What do you think are the key points that differ between what you experienced in the**
527 **American system and what you knew from the Indian system?**
528

529 A: Well, firstly in the Indian system the way the professor interacted with the students was very
530 different. It was a one-way communication from professor to student. You never questioned
531 the professor. You know, even if they stood up there and said, “The world was created one
532 million years ago” and you knew that was wrong, you never questioned the professor. And of
533 course, it’s changed now; I’m talking about thirty years ago. That was different.
534

535 The other thing that was different was that here {in the US} we had assignments that were
536 due and nobody was going to remind you that this was due. Over there it was ... you were
537 reminded every second.
538

539 It was ... I thought the American system was just so much better. Just so much better.
540 Because it allowed you to explore. In India I would have never been allowed to do a Master’s
541 in computer science. In India I would have never been admitted to a Ph.D. program at the age
542 of 45. But I was able to do all that here {in the United States}. I was able to explore.
543

543 [35:05]

544 **V: Interesting.**
545

546 A: Yes. So it was very different. And, you know, the way students are admitted is very different.
547 A lot of admissions here, particularly in graduate school, happen ... a lot of it is ... “Are you
548 really ... how interested are you?” Yes, grades matter, background matters, but they look at
549 the whole person, as opposed to just one thing. In India it’s a very narrowly focused vision.
550 “What were your grades?” End of story.
551

552 **V: So really your Master’s education being in parallel with working at IBM had a very**
553 **strong practical aspect, I suspect.**
554

555 A: Right. I worked at IBM, not throughout, but in the last year of my Master’s. And I was in
556 what is called — the university had a co-op program with IBM — I was in that. And ... yeah.
557 It was very interesting, working at IBM. I got hired to do assembly language programming. I
558 don’t think I liked it, though. You know, I don’t think I liked it too much. But ... it was a
559 good experience, I think.
560

561 **V: Yes?**
562

563 A: Mmm hmm.
564

565 **V: Any classes, once you got past these first two difficult ones, that were particularly**
566 **meaningful or interesting for you?**

567

568 A: You know what ... yeah. There was a programming class. We were about ... how many
569 students were in that class? It was a huge lecture hall and it was full. And I still remember the
570 professor walked in and she looks at us and she says, "Look to your left; look to your right.
571 Only 25% of you will be left in the class at the end of the class." And I said, "OK. So I'm
572 one of the 75%." But I learned a lot in that class and I made an A in the class. And that was
573 very meaningful for me, because hearing that sentence at the beginning of the class — that
574 "only 25% of you will be left" — and then going on to make an A in the class sort of
575 reinforced to me that I was on the right path. And I was ... it was very interesting. I wrote the
576 classic ... game of classic concentration in that. I wrote a simple text editor. It was very
577 rewarding to see what I had created working immediately.

578

579 **V: Any professors while you were working on your Master's who you established a**
580 **relationship with, who were mentors?**

581

582 A: No, I never did establish a relationship with anyone at that time.

583

584 **V: So let's move forward a little bit. At what point did you find more of a support**
585 **structure to encourage you as a professional in computing?**

586

587 A: You know, when I ... when I worked at Broome Community College I had a couple of
588 people who were really good mentors. There was a professor named Elizabeth Mollen — M-
589 o-l-l-e-n — and she was very good. And she was always very encouraging. And then there
590 was another professor there, Rachel Hinton, and she was very good, too. You know, she used
591 to do things that were very inspiring. You could always turn to her for help, for
592 encouragement. And those are the people who encouraged me along.

593

594 And then I moved to Austin. Once I was in Austin it was different because I had to start over
595 again. There were people in my department who were very, very good and even now there
596 are ...

597

598 **V: Back at Broome?**

599

600 A: Here. At Austin Community College.

601

602 **V: Oh, here. Once you got to ACC?**

603

604 A: At Austin Community College. I have some colleagues who have been very good mentors
605 over the years. I have a dean of computer studies, advanced technology. Her primary degree
606 is not in computer studies; it's in fine arts. But she's amazingly involved in computer science
607 ... and she has been a great mentor. And she has really encouraged me along.

608

609 **V: What is her name?**

610

611 A: Linda Smarzik — S-m-a-r-z-i-k. And then there was ... almost everybody at the department
612 has been ... almost ... no, maybe not. Let me scratch that. Several people at the department

613 have been great mentors. You know, there ... some male professors. We have very few
614 females in the department. When I started in the department I think we were three females in
615 a whole male-dominated department. Even now we're ... we are maybe seven females and
616 all the rest are males. Our department chair is a female.

617
618 **V: What size is the department?**

619 [39:56]

620 A: We have total of about 35 full-time faculty and the rest are part-time.

621
622 **V: OK.**

623
624 A: Out of the 35 full-time faculty, there about seven female. So ...

625
626 With some professors it was a challenge because I could feel that gender bias coming
627 through very clearly. But with others it was ... I had a lot of respect from others who looked
628 up to me as somebody who would take the lead on projects and somebody who would guide
629 them and who always encouraged me.

630
631 **V: We haven't talked about why you ended up moving from India to New York and then**
632 **from New York to Austin. Do you care to address those moves?**

633
634 A: Yeah, I can address that. I moved from India to New York because I got married. So my
635 husband was in New York. And then we moved from New York to here {Austin, TX}
636 because of IBM. Because IBM moved us. He worked for IBM.

637
638 And he actually has been a big encourager of me to stay in computer science. Because he is a
639 computer ... he is a software engineer himself and he is currently the director of software
640 engineering and technology at a company. And he has all through the years really
641 encouraged my ... not just my entry into computer science, but also to stay within computer
642 science.

643
644 **V: So it gives you the opportunity to talk professionally at home.**

645
646 A: Yes.

647
648 **V: Do you do that a great deal?**

649
650 A: Not too much, you know. But ... we used to. We do ... the big thing is that when he talks
651 about his work or when I have something to talk about we both are able to understand each
652 other.

653
654 **V: That's always helpful.**

655
656 A: Yeah.

657
658 **V: Very helpful.**

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A: Yeah. So it's not Greek what he's doing and it's not Greek to him what I'm doing.

V: Right. Right. OK.

So you have recently completed your doctorate.

A: Mmm hmm.

V: And so you were working at ACC for a number of years before you decided to return to school, is that correct?

A: Yes. Yes.

V: Do you want to talk about the process of deciding to work on the doctorate and then the experience?

A: Yes. When I was working on my Master's in computer science in Binghamton University, I wanted to do a doctorate immediately after that. But my son was born, 1988, so I knew I didn't ... wouldn't be able to able to commit the time. And all along the way, that passion stayed at the back of my mind, that I do want to get a doctorate. And I was debating between computer science and education administration. The reason I was doing education administration is because I wanted to have the ability to go and work anywhere in the world and work in a university setting.

So it's very interesting how I got admitted there {The University of Texas at Austin}. I played around with the idea and at that time things didn't seem to be going well in my life and I don't want to really discuss that. But it was a very low point in my life and I thought, "Something has to change. Either something has to change or I am going to end up taking my own life." And ... but I decided that I was going to change my life and I was going to go get that Ph.D. I had so wanted all these years. So I went to UT Austin and I went to talk to a couple advisors and I felt like there was this sort of a wall, where they were saying, "Oh, our programs are very selective. We are very picky who we choose." I said "Fine. Whatever." In January I went and met with them and they asked me, "Well, why didn't you get a doctorate 'til now?" {I said,} "Because my kids were young and I couldn't commit the time." They said then, "How do we know you'll commit it now?" I said "The very fact that I didn't attempt it when I couldn't commit the time tells that you that the reason I'm attempting it is because I will be able to commit the time."

I went ahead and took the GRE. Just walked off the street and took the GRE. And ... and they said that they would be looking at the writing portion of the GRE very closely and seeing what score I got. And that was just when the GRE had just started the writing portion. Well, the prompt I got was, "Without traditions cultures just exist, they don't thrive." I mean, you're telling an Indian about traditions, about cultures. I just wrote about my wedding. I wrote about holi {a Hindu celebration} in India. I wrote about all these things in India. I made a very ... I think I made a five-and-a-half out of six on the writing portion.

705 [45:11]

706 So I applied for admission. And it's very interesting when I applied for admission. The
707 admission applications were due February 1st. I was supposed to be in Washington DC on
708 January 29th, 30th, 31st, and February 1st to review grants for the National Science
709 Foundation. I was supposed to fly out on 29th night or 30th morning, I forget. 29th night ...
710 evening, I think. Well, there was an ice storm along the way, so the travel agency called me
711 and said, "Never mind, we've booked you through Columbus. There's no ice expected in
712 Washington DC. Just go." And guess what? Reagan National iced over. And I was able to
713 finish my application and I did get admitted. They had forty-eight applicants that year; they
714 admitted eight. I was one of the eight. So that was it.

715
716 I took one class to begin with. I went into the first class thinking the same way I'm going into
717 this new job. Thinking, "I'm going to go to the first class. I'm going to sit there. I'm not
718 going to understand a thing. And, of course, I'm going to fail the class. There is no other
719 possible outcome of this." Well, I made an A in the class. Then for the next three semesters, I
720 took one class each. I was too scared to attempt more than one.

721
722 But then I got myself into it full-time. I became ... actually I became very involved with the
723 department. I became the coordinator while working full-time, while raising two kids, and
724 also rushing off to India every six months to look after my parents. I became the coordinator
725 of the student professional association and just was very involved in the department. I was a
726 TA. Did all kinds of things. Made lasting relationships over there. My committee chair and I
727 are friends now, more than mentor and mentee. We're actually friends.

728
729 It's been an amazing, amazing experience for me. It has been the best experience of my life.
730 If I had to live my life over again, I would not change a thing about it. And I think it helped
731 give meaning to my life, which was already there, but I just wasn't able to see it. You know,
732 because I was so stuck in the rut of going to work, teaching, learning new technologies all the
733 time, which was ... which put a lot of pressure on me. Raising kids. Looking after a family.
734 This gave me a meaning to my life.

735
736 **V: So it sounds like you had some very meaningful relationships that you developed.**

737
738 A: Absolutely.

739
740 **V: Are there some of those you'd like to tell more about?**

741
742 A: Well, Richard Reddick. I'll tell you about him. His last name is R-e-d-d-i-c-k. He was my
743 committee chair, my dissertation committee chair. I still remember the first time I met him.
744 He is from Harvard. He's got a Ph.D. from Harvard and he's got his Master's from Harvard.
745 And I remember driving to meet him and thinking that this was going to be a person who's
746 ... you know, who is going to be in some cloud because he's from Harvard. He was the most
747 down to earth person I had ever met. He was the friendliest person I had ever met. And
748 apparently — later on he told me that he had heard so many things about me in the
749 department, all the things I was doing, that he was in awe of meeting me. We hit it off right
750 away.

751
752 And he has been the most amazing mentor ever. He has encouraged me when I needed
753 encouraging. He has dared me to explore new things. When I said, “No, I can’t do it,” he
754 said, “Ah, you got this.” He would always make it sound so easy. Even when I had doubts
755 about the whole process, he would make it sound good. And he was one of those people who
756 I felt that I could call at any time, that I could ... I could seek his guidance at any time. And
757 he always referred to me as being very dedicated, very smart. And he always gave me his
758 opinion, not just for the sake of giving an opinion, or not just because he was ... but because
759 he truly had my interest at heart.

760 [50:11]
761 One of the things ... let’s talk about the dissertation topic itself. I was ... I worked with the
762 Computing Educators Oral History Project and I was committed to doing my dissertation on
763 women in computing. That was something that I wanted to do. I was still trying to figure out
764 what angle I would do, you know, instead of just doing the paucity of women in computing
765 — everybody knew that. So what was the angle I was going to take on this?

766
767 But one day we went to lunch. And that day I had had a particularly bad week in the Indian
768 community where, you know, you go to the dinners and the only conversation is kids’ grades,
769 kids’ class ranks, what extra-curriculars. And it was just ... I was just thinking, wondering,
770 “What if a child was failing in this community? How would those parents even sit through
771 these conversations? And who would they turn to for support if that happened?” And I
772 started ... I went on this diatribe with him, it was at the Clay Pit Restaurant. And he just sat
773 there and he looked at me for about thirty minutes as I went on and on passionately about
774 this. He said, “You know, you just described a dissertation to me.” And that’s when my topic
775 changed. And that’s the topic I finally ended up doing.

776
777 And throughout the topic he was always looking at ways that I could make the topic more
778 meaningful and never saying that this was bad. He was saying, “Yeah, this is OK, but let’s
779 look at what else can be done.” His main aim was my success. So he was a great mentor. A
780 great mentor. And I’m so lucky to have had him in my life in those four years ... in five ...
781 four ... four years at UT.

782
783 **V: And so what about — once you’d selected your topic — the process that you went**
784 **through to design the study, collect the data, write, and graduate?**

785
786 A: Right. So my topic — of course, because I was a computer scientist, it would be absolutely
787 blasphemous for me to do a qualitative study, right? It had to be quantitative. Any self-
788 respecting computer science person only does quantitative studies and not qualitative. And
789 that’s what I was going to do. Of course it was going to be a quantitative study. I was going
790 to run the data. I was going to run these functions. And turns out my study was a qualitative
791 study. {laughs}

792
793 I interviewed — after deciding the topic, after deciding, it was not only a qualitative study, it
794 was a phenomenological study, which means all I was looking at was perspectives. And then
795 deriving meaning from those perspectives. So he was a qualitative researcher and he guided
796 me along the way. But the process was that I had eight participants and I interviewed them

797 two times each. Analyzed the data using ATLAS.ti. And then multiple iterations of the
798 proposal, the dissertation. And finally July 18th {2012} we went to a final defense.

799

800 **V: So almost a year ago.**

801

802 A: Almost a year ago, yes. Yes. July 18th was the final defense. And there were some questions
803 about my conclusions, which right as soon as the questions were raised, I realized that one of
804 — not ... I shouldn't say "conclusions." One conclusion. And that the way I worded the
805 conclusion was very harsh and very derogatory to a certain ... professional service at the
806 university. So I had to redo that portion of it and ... but that was a small thing which got
807 done overnight. But ... yeah. So that was my study.

808

809 **V: So you finished in July, turned it in, and then walked in May of ...**

810

811 A: May.

812

813 **V: ... 2013.**

814

815 A: Because university does walks only once a year.

816

817 **V: Yes.**

818

819 A: So I received my diploma in the mail in August, but I walked in May 2013.

820

821 **V: Fabulous. I know that it's has been an exciting past few months.**

822

823 A: Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm.

824 [54:51]

825 **V: Very good. Exciting.**

826

827 A: Yes!

828

829 **V: Any thoughts about the professional organizations? You talked about organizing the ...**
830 **at the department. Had you become involved in professional organizations outside of**
831 **the university?**

832

833 A: Yes, I was involved in SIGCSE and I attended several SIGCSE conferences and ... Actually
834 my first SIGCSE conference was in 2000, in Austin itself. And I loved it. I loved meeting all
835 the people. There was so much energy at the conference. And then I went to a few others. I
836 think I've been to a total of four SIGCSE conferences. But that's something I was involved
837 in.

838

839 I also got involved with the Association for Women in Technology in Austin. And I also got
840 very deeply involved in the Consortium for Computing Sciences in Colleges. In fact I was
841 the panels and tutorials chair. I was ... I actually was the conference chair for the 2004
842 conference.

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V: So this is for the region that includes Texas?

A: For the Region. South Central Region. South Central Region for the Consortium for Computing Sciences in Colleges.

And my involvement with SIGCSE also took me to Madrid with the Computing Educators Oral History Project {for ITiCSE in 2008}, which was in and of itself a very highly educational experience. Just working with these wonderful people from different universities and being a valuable member of the project was very interesting indeed. Very interesting. So those were my involvements.

I am also an avid volunteer in the community. I coordinated the Destination Imagination Project¹ for different schools for many, many years. I was a Destination Imagination coach for fifteen years. That's my involvement outside the workplace.

V: OK. So as an instructor, as a teacher, it sounds like you have a constant process of renewing your knowledge, understanding. Do you want to talk about your teaching philosophy, some of the challenges you've faced?

A: Yes. My teaching philosophy is based a lot on nurturing. And — I know I'm going sound like ... very different from many other professors. I have colleagues of mine who have these deadlines, who say a lab is due at midnight and if it comes at 12:01am, the student gets a zero. I have a lot of issues with that. My teaching philosophy is more based on allowing the students to explore, to nurture them, and to make sure that they actually understand and they understand the subject rather than just try to commit to a deadline. Because that doesn't teach the students anything really. Yes, it teaches them to meet strict deadlines. But we also know that even in industry, deadlines are not like that. If a build is due at midnight and if it comes in five past midnight, that doesn't mean the person gets fired. It just doesn't work that way. Things happen in people's lives.

So my teaching philosophy is based on giving the students the latest information about that technology. Allowing the students to explore that technology. Giving them a progression of learning. For example, they read, they listen to me, and on online courses I have videos that they watch, then they do. They read, watch, do. That is the teaching philosophy. I've had great success with this philosophy. I've gone ... in my online class, which I teach for ... programming — which is a really tough class, where the retention traditionally was very low — once I took over the class I had a retention of about 77% in there, which was really good. And my department really appreciated that.

Also my teaching philosophy has been to try new things, like for example, Alice. I tried that out in my classes when it was very new. It wasn't received well by my department. And so we had to discontinue that. But I ... it exposed the students to different things.

¹ The Destination Imagination program is a fun, hands-on system of learning that fosters students' creativity, courage and curiosity through open-ended academic Challenges in the fields of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), fine arts, and service learning. See destinationimagination.org/

886 [59:56]

887 The other thing is to give the students real world exposure. For example, I'll have guest
888 speakers come into my class even though it's a programming class, which really doesn't have
889 a need for a guest speaker. But I'll still have a guest speaker come in one day and tell them
890 about the opportunities available.

891
892 I also try to form a sense of community in the class, whether it's an online class, because I
893 feel that if they have a sense of community, they are more likely to last in the class. I see
894 many of my colleagues — not many, some, very few of my colleagues — who will refer to
895 students' questions as "stupid questions" and I take objection to that. And I tell my students,
896 "The only stupid question is the one that's never asked." Because, having been a student
897 myself, I know what it's like. I know it's hard to ask questions sometimes, but if you don't
898 ask the questions, you can never know the answers. No.

899
900 So I encourage students. I'm available to them outside the class. For my online classes, I
901 used to even tell the students, "Hey, I'll be sitting at Starbucks this day and {time}, working,
902 if anyone wants to come and join me." And my students would come. They would come and
903 sit with me and they would work with me.

904
905 So ... that has been my teaching philosophy. At a community college, the population is a
906 little bit different. You have all different ages of students. Some are much older; some are
907 much younger. At my campus of Austin Community College at Cyprus Creek, we generally
908 have a fairly young population. And a lot of the people who come are professionals in the
909 field. So I've had a really good set of students these sixteen years that I've been here.

910

911 **V: You talk about online. Are the students primarily in the Austin area?**

912

913 A: Yes. I've had a couple of students — like I had one student who was in Afghanistan; I had
914 one who was in Bogota, Columbia, at a military base; I've had another in Germany — so
915 then we have procedures in place for those students to test. But labs, everything is turned in
916 online, so that's not an issue.

917

918 **V: And you're responsible for developing the full course?**

919

920 A: Yes, the full course: the curriculum, the tests, the labs, everything.

921

922 **V: OK. And you talked about videos. You also record those to put online?**

923

924 A: I either find them online, but I have recorded myself about forty to forty-five different videos
925 to put online ...

926

927 **V: Yes.**

928

929 A: ... using Jing and Camtasia Studio and ...

930

931 **V: OK. All right. So we've talked about your advisor as an important mentor and friend.**
932 **Are there others in your life who have evolved to be mentors, who have helped you on**
933 **your path as a professional?**
934

935 A: Hmm. Let me think. I talked about my husband, who's been a good mentor and has always
936 encouraged me to ... in computer science.
937

938 **V: And his name is ... ?**
939

940 A: Satwinder, S-a-t-w-i-n-d-e-r. I'm trying to think of others. My parents have always
941 encouraged me, although they never have been in the field.
942

943 You know, another person I've really always admired, ever since the day I met her, is
944 Barbara Owens. There's something about her that has always been very inspiring. I watch all
945 that she's accomplished in her life and it's amazing. And ... she hasn't been a direct mentor,
946 but she's somebody who's been a great inspiration to me through the years and for staying on
947 in this line.
948

949 So, now for the first time in so many years, when I start this new job — although I'll still be
950 involved with computer science, I'll be setting curriculum and guiding the program towards
951 ABET accreditation — but I'll still have a more broader role that will take me a little bit
952 away from computer science. And I don't know how I feel about that. It's yet to be seen.
953

954 **V: There are a number of unknowns in what you're venturing into. Absolutely.**
955

956 A: Yes. As I was telling my son, I said, "I'm going from complete security and stability to
957 complete insecurity and instability." So it's a very major leap of faith that I'm taking here.
958

958 [64:54]

959 **V: It is. And it's a five-year commitment that you're making?**
960

961 A: No, it's a one-year commitment to begin with. They wanted me to sign a three-year
962 commitment, but I thought that was way too much, thinking that, "What if I don't like it?
963 Then I'm stuck for three years!"
964

965 **V: Yes.**
966

967 A: And I'm moving alone. Family is not moving.
968

969 **V: So there are a lot of logistics involved ...**
970

971 A: Lot of logistics.
972

973 **V: ... in how you're going to be living, how you're going to remain connected with your**
974 **family. But of course you'll be closer to your parents and brother.**
975

976 A: Yes. And also how I'm going to be living alone in a city that is known as the most insecure
977 ... the third most insecure city for women in the world. Hmmp!

978
979 **V: So, a lot of things to think about.**

980
981 A: A lot of things to about, yes. But, you know, I think it will be fine. Hmmp!

982
983 **V: Well, some enormous adventures. Enormous. You mentioned being in Washington DC**
984 **to do a review panel. Have you done that often? Have you been involved in writing**
985 **grants yourself?**

986
987 A: I've done a review panel three times in DC. Have I been involved in writing grants? I haven't
988 directly written a grant, but I've been involved on the team that was meeting with the grant-
989 writing team to discuss grants. To discuss the grant. I'm currently involved — the project I'm
990 finishing up for Austin Community College — is a one-and-a-half million dollar grant that
991 was received from the Department of Labor for accelerated program retraining. I'm currently
992 involved with redesigning one of our major programming courses and offering it as a
993 competency module-based course, as opposed to a traditional course, and it's all online.

994
995 **V: Very interesting. So what will happen with that as you move to India? Are there others**
996 **taking over or ...?**

997
998 A: Yes, somebody else is taking over that and I'm going to finish my part of it by July 30th. And
999 then I hope to stay involved with some of those things, probably as a consultant.

1000
1001 **V: Yes, that sounds like a nice way to be able to remain involved. We've talked some about**
1002 **professional service, about your roles in the professional community. Is there anything**
1003 **else that you would like to add on those regards?**

1004
1005 A: Mmm. I'm trying to think. I'm trying to think what else I've done. No, not really. I mean, is
1006 there any questions that come up in your mind regarding those?

1007
1008 **V: Primarily it was just pondering if there were some pieces that we've missed in our**
1009 **discussion here that have an effect on how you've developed as a professional and the**
1010 **things you've been able to contribute.**

1011
1012 A: Well, you know, even the outside involvement, for example, Consortium for Computing
1013 Sciences {(CCSC)}, was very ... very helpful towards my professional development because
1014 that allowed me to get out of ACC and see what's happening outside. And it allowed me to
1015 meet all these people who were very accomplished and from different universities and ... and
1016 have ... look up to them as ... and get inspired by what they were doing and bring it back
1017 with me and try to put some of those things in practice at ACC.

1018
1019 Although I'm a little sad to say that every time I went to the CCSC conference or a meeting, I
1020 came back totally excited about something new and it would be killed in my department.
1021 Because they would say, "Oh no, we are not ready for that yet." For example, Python

1022 programming, I came back five years ago and came back so excited that we were going to
1023 offer a Python course. The first time we offered a Python course in my department was last
1024 year. So it took awhile to get them to look at things. That was disappointing, I thought. I
1025 thought ... in hindsight, I thought I could have done a different ... a more aggressive job in
1026 bringing new things and not giving up so easily, but I did tend to give up easily. When I saw
1027 that there was a pushback, I did tend to give up.

1028
1029 **V: And does that relate to the type of position you had more or to the types of relationships**
1030 **and the others ...**

1031
1032 A: I think more to my personality than anything for me to ... it was more of a self-defense
1033 mechanism, the giving up, more than anything else.

1034
1035 **V: OK.**

1036
1037 A: Where I don't want to deal with this, so I'm just not going to deal with it.

1038 [69:57]

1039 **V: Right. Continue on the current path.**

1040
1041 A: Right.

1042
1043 **V: So, as far as challenges are concerned, that certainly is one type of challenge. Are there**
1044 **any other types of challenges as far as your work environment or career that we**
1045 **haven't talked about?**

1046
1047 A: Well, you know, I did face challenges from some of the older faculty members when I
1048 started. For a long time I was the youngest person in the department and not only that, I was
1049 female. I wore a skirt, you know? So that was a problem ... that turned out to be a challenge
1050 with some faculty members.

1051
1052 Initially, when I first used to face those challenges, I would back off. But for the past few
1053 years I've learned to hold my own and have an equal argument on an equal footing. And I
1054 think that whole perspective has come in from being involved in these outside organizations.
1055 I think if I had stayed closed, just within Austin Community College, I don't think I would
1056 have had that confidence to face some of those challenges. So, that was ... that's been a
1057 challenge.

1058
1059 **V: So it sounds like, as a professional, you've been maturing and finding your voice.**

1060
1061 A: Yes. Yes. And just being in the Ph.D. program also gave me a lot more confidence and
1062 enabled me also to have that confidence, that if I was making an argument, I could win this
1063 argument because I had all my facts right.

1064
1065 **V: And that brings us back to your first loves, academically, which were debate and the**
1066 **English literature.**

1067

1068 A: Right.

1069

1070 **V: How do you see those early foundations playing out in your career now?**

1071

1072 A: I think they have a very important role because I can pretty much go into any meeting, any
1073 situation, and not be afraid of speaking. Because I think that's the biggest hurdle people face,
1074 is not being able to speak in public. Because at public ... being able to talk to different
1075 people is very important.

1076

1077 And I think that love of English literature somehow brought a passion into me and that
1078 passion shows when I go and work on new projects, when I go and work with other people.
1079 Now that I'm leaving the college, that has come back to me in the form of so many different
1080 people — not from my department, but from other departments within the college and other
1081 areas within the college — who have been writing to me or calling me or personally coming
1082 to me and telling me how passionate I was about everything I did and how they really
1083 enjoyed working with me and how they're going to miss me.

1084

1085 **V: What do you think the source of that passion is?**

1086

1087 A: I think a lot of it has to do with, again, that whole thing of me being competitive with myself,
1088 wanting to do the best I can possibly do, and not giving somebody an opportunity to point a
1089 finger at me and say, "You didn't do what you were supposed to do." That's something my
1090 mother always told me. "Never give someone an opportunity to point a finger at you." I think
1091 that's where it comes from. I'm not sure. I'm pretty sure that's where it comes from.

1092

1093 **V: We've talked about outside interests, Of course, as you're moving, a lot of your outside
1094 interests are going to be set aside, just coping with ...**

1095

1096 A: Yes.

1097

1098 **V: ... the change that's going on. Shall we talk a little bit more about the change and what
1099 you see for your future personally?**

1100

1101 A: I think I can only grow. This move is going to be a hard move 'cause I'm go ... many people
1102 tell me, "Well, it should be easy for you because you were born and raised in India." Yeah,
1103 but I'm going back after twenty-nine years. So I'm really going back to a foreign country.

1104

1105 There's going to be a gender bias. I've already felt that talking to the current employer ... the
1106 future employer. I'm going to have to deal with that. But then — I was discussing that with a
1107 colleague at work — and I said, "But then, being in computer science, I've already dealt with
1108 gender bias, very often, very often, on more than one occasion." So I know how to deal with
1109 it.

1110 [74:44]

1111 I think there are going to be a lot of challenges, a lot of challenges. But I also think that
1112 despite my constant fear that I'm going to fall flat on my face, I think they will be learning
1113 experiences. And they will help me grow as a professional, not in computer science maybe,

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1114 but as an overall professional. And I feel I will come out much wiser. I will come out ready
1115 to face even better challenges after a year or two years.

1116
1117 As far as personal growth goes, just living alone, by myself, will give me a chance to really
1118 go deep into myself and investigate my own true inner self, which I haven't had a chance to
1119 do for years because I've been a mom, I've been a wife, I've been a daughter, I've been a
1120 daughter-in-law, I've ... you know? So that's going to help.

1121
1122 Again, like I said, I'm an avid volunteer, so I've already decided I'm going to become a
1123 member of the American Women's Association in Delhi and go on volunteer projects with
1124 them. Which should help me meet some different kinds of people and also add to my
1125 personal growth that way.

1126
1127 **V: Sounds like an excellent plan.**

1128
1129 A: I hope.

1130
1131 **V: And I know from our earlier conversations that you're expecting to have visitors as well**

1132 ...
1133

1134 A: Yes.
1135

1136 **V: ... over time. So that will keep you connected.**

1137
1138 A: Yes. My daughter is visiting within two weeks of me going. My husband is visiting in
1139 September. My son is visiting in November. I'm coming back in October. And then I've had
1140 people tell me that ... friends tell me that they're going to come and visit. In fact, I had my
1141 professional photographer, who came and took pictures yesterday — she's become a friend
1142 over the years — and she's looking to start a travel photojournalist's blog and she wants to
1143 come and see me in Delhi. So, you know, so many ... my dean, my current dean at Austin
1144 Community College, is coming to visit me in December. She loves India.

1145
1146 And so it's going to be a challenge. It's ... I would be fooling myself if I thought that I would
1147 go there and it's going to be smooth sailing. Even simple things like what to wear to work. I
1148 know I can't wear a skirt. That's not going to be accepted. So now is a pants suit acceptable
1149 or do I have to wear Indian clothes? And I'm not going to wear Indian clothes to work
1150 because that's just not me. That's not my personality. And if I'm dressed in a way I'm not
1151 comfortable, I can't think. So that's going to be a challenge.

1152
1153 They want me to possibly work half-day Saturday. Am I going to do that? Probably not. And
1154 that's going to be a challenge to deal with. So little things, you know? Little things. But I'm
1155 trying not to be too hard on myself. That's one of the things one of my professors at UT told
1156 me, is ... he's ... again, he's another very good mentor, Dr. Ed Sharpe at UT.

1157
1158 {several seconds of audio removed due to phone call and message}

1159

1160 OK. So, I'm not under any false illusions that this is going to be smooth. It's not. It's going
1161 to be rocky to begin with. It's going to be a huge learning experience to begin with. They're
1162 going to have to get used to me. I'm going to have to get used to them. But I think it can only
1163 enrich me.

1164

1165 **V: You were beginning to mention another professor at UT?**

1166

1167 A: Yes, Dr. Ed Sharpe at UT — S-h-a-r-p-e. He has been a great mentor. He was my advisor
1168 when I started the program. He has been an absolutely wonderful mentor to me and one of
1169 the pieces of advice he gave me during one of our meetings was ... he said, "You're too hard
1170 on yourself." He says, "You expect too much out of yourself." He said, "Allow yourself to be
1171 OK without being so hard on yourself." And I think I'm going to have to remember that
1172 advice when I go there because if I'm too hard on myself that's going to be a perfect recipe
1173 for disaster.

1174

1175 **V: Part of it perhaps is that little Imposter Syndrome sitting back there ...**

1176

1177 A: Yes! Yes! And that's what ...

1178

1179 **V: ... getting in the way.**

1180

1181 A: Yes, that if I don't do this perfectly right then somebody's going to think, "Oh well, she's not
1182 worth it." So, constantly trying to prove myself.

1183 [80:01]

1184 **V: Yes. Yep. If I asked you for advice to a young person just getting ready to start on a
1185 computing career, what advice would you provide?**

1186

1187 A: I would tell them to keep their passion and I would give them the same advice Dr. Sharpe
1188 gave me, is don't be too hard on yourself. Allow yourself to explore. And if you fail along
1189 the way, it's okay. It's part of the process. It's part of the process, you know? Because only
1190 ... I failed. I failed in my first course. But that didn't stop me. And keep the passion. Explore.
1191 Computer science is a vast field. It's not just one narrow, focused, narrowly focused road.
1192 Find within computer science where your passion is. Do you want to go into pure
1193 development? Do you want to go into computer science education? Where do you want to
1194 be? And what is your ultimate goal? Find that. What do you want to do with this?

1195

1196 And I think one of the things I would — particularly for women — is that expect a gender
1197 bias when you go in. Expect to have to speak louder when you're in a group to make yourself
1198 heard. Expect to have to say the same thing three times. And you will come out on top at the
1199 end. Unfortunately, our corporate America doesn't do a very good job of, you know ...
1200 doesn't do a very good job of bringing out women in this field. Although we have women
1201 leaders in the field, media doesn't showcase them, so to say. What is showcased are the Carly
1202 Fiorina's, who have done something that was not acceptable to the company and who were
1203 removed from the company. But all the women who are doing so well. Let's take the case of
1204 Marissa Mayer, who is the CEO of Yahoo. What is not being talked about so much is what

1205 she is doing to turn the company around. Yet what is being talked about is how she took
1206 three days of maternity leave and came back to work.

1207
1208 So, what I want to tell people is that you are going to see those things but find ... stick with
1209 the passion. If you were passionate enough to enter the field, then you're passionate enough
1210 to go through. Because there was something in you that made you enter the field. So they are
1211 ... if ... so if you were passionate enough to enter the field, you are passionate enough to get
1212 through it. Just stay with it.

1213
1214 What else can I say? What other advice can I give? Find some mentors. Find people who will
1215 have faith in you. Find people who will be willing to listen to you. Not just tell you what to
1216 do, but also willing to listen to you. Listen to what you have to say. Find some friends whom
1217 you can lean on while you're in this process, don't do it alone. So, those are some of the
1218 things that I ... some of the pieces of advice ... I would give to people.

1219
1220 The other piece of advice is ... studies can get — whether you're doing a Ph.D., an
1221 undergraduate, or a Master's degree — studies can get very overwhelming, so find
1222 something outside the classroom that is your passion and pursue it. Because that will enrich
1223 you. And get involved with as many things as you can get, because every single experience
1224 in your life is a learning experience. Even if you fall down a cliff, that's a learning
1225 experience. So don't let that discourage you from taking a hike again just because you fell
1226 down.

1227
1228 **V: OK. Thank you.**

1229
1230 A: Thank you.

1231
1232 **V: Is there any story we haven't talked about that you would like to have remembered in**
1233 **the context of this interview?**

1234
1235 A: Not really. I think we've pretty much talked about everything.

1236 **[84:52]**
1237 **V: All right. Anything else that you would like to add at the close?**

1238
1239 A: No, I'm ... you know in hindsight, I'm glad I went into computer science. It's been
1240 wonderful. It's been a great ride. I've met amazing people. And I'm more than glad of going
1241 into computer science. I'm so glad I got involved outside the classroom and outside the
1242 college because that has enriched me beyond belief. And now as I go on into a new chapter, I
1243 know that all the experiences I've gathered along the way are going to somehow, somewhere,
1244 something about those experiences is going to come in handy and help me succeed where
1245 I'm going.

1246
1247 **V: Excellent. I'm so excited for the adventure ahead. I'm so grateful that we could find the**
1248 **time for us to sit down ...**

1249
1250 A: I'm so honored that you chose to interview me.

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V: It's going to be exciting to return in a few years, sit down again, and hear where things have gone for you.

A: Where things have gone. Yes. Yes. I'm planning to keep a blog. In fact, Richard Reddick who's become my friend, who was my committee chair, wants me to keep a detailed private blog of every experience I've gone through there and then write a book about it. So, I don't know if I'm going to write a book about it, but I am going to keep a blog.

V: That's an exciting thought. Very interesting. Good advice.

A: Yes. And he wants me to explore issues such as my identity as a woman, my identity as a woman in computer science in traditional India, my identity as a American with a brown skin returning to native India and being treated like an American. How does that impact my own self-identity? And so all of those we discussed at length. So, let's see if I'm able to do that.

V: Well, we wish you the best ...

A: Thank you.

V: ... and look forward to the continuation.

A: Thank you.

V: Thank you for the time.

A: Thank you.

[87:19]