FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewees: **Ayyam P. (Raghu) & Shantha Raghuthaman**

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Interviewer: Pat Pollicoff

Transcriber: Marsha Smith

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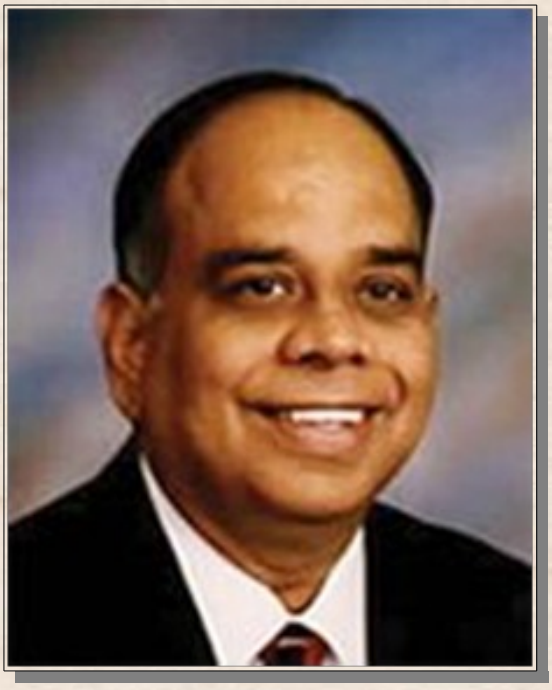


Transcript

POLLICOFF: Please tell me your names and dates of your birth.

RAGHU: My name is Ayyam P. Raghuthaman. I'm called Raghu by my friends, my parents and my wife. My date of birth is November 2, 1944.

SHANTHA: My name is Shantha Raghuthaman and my date of birth is May 31, 1951.

POLLICOFF: Please tell me where you were born.

SHANTHA: I was born in Iran. My father worked for the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company so he had been living in Abadan, Iran, for twelve years. When he got married, my mom joined him and they lived in Iran. I was born in Abadan but ten days later, there was a revolution, which was the very first revolution. So they had to evacuate all the families and all the people who worked for the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. So my father was part of that and my mother had to leave when I was about 12 days old. She left with a group of women who had come from India, and we went to India. My father stayed on for a month to pack up everything, and then he left. After that, he was posted in Seria, Brunei, and that's where I grew up.

I went to school there, did my O Levels, and from there I went to India for four years to go to college, in Puna, which is on the outskirts of Bombay (Mumbai). I studied zoology with botany and chemistry as my subsidiary subjects. Initially I thought about going to medical school but I had some problems getting into medical school in India because they classified me as a foreign student because I wasn't born in India. It was really difficult to get into some of the private schools. So when I graduated, I went into teaching, starting my training in Bachelor of Education (B. Ed). Then I got married and I left. Raghu was in England at that time so we lived in England before coming here.

POLLICOFF: Raghu, tell me where you were born and where you got your education.

RAGHU: I was born in south India, a place called Chennai. It was actually called the Madras District; it was the Madras Presidency as they used to call it. I grew up in the city of Chennai, going to Madras Christian College high school, which is a Protestant school. Then I went to Madras Christian College in the same city. and to Madras Medical College for my medical career.

After that, my father retired. We did not come from a wealthy background, and in order to do post-graduate studies in India, you had to have money on your own. They did not pay you. So I applied for an immigration voucher to the United Kingdom. In 1969, I left India and went to England. I did my higher studies in England for a couple of years. Then my parents insisted that I get married. Our parents have a lot of say in our future. I was 25 or 26 then.

So they arranged a meeting for me to meet with Shantha. I asked her if she had any objections and she kept quiet so I took that for a yes. I think sometimes she wonders if she should have spoken up then! (laughing)

POLLICOFF: I would think that would be hard! It would have been hard for me. I would have had a lot more questions. When you were introduced, did your families know each other?

BOTH: Yes.

POLICOFF: But you had never met.

RAGHU: Right. Back in India, the arranged marriage is really a master computer match. The grandparents are involved. They all think about what qualities their daughter has and what would be good for them. And where would they find a boy within the families that we know? It's a process of selection, very much different from, "Do you like a 38-22-44, or do you like blonde hair, or do you like 6 foot 2 inches, or 4 foot 8 inches." If you look at dating, that's what people go by. But the families do this computer programming in their heads.

They also look into the economics because when a rich boy marries a poor girl, it's a problem. When a rich girl marries a poor boy, that's also a problem. Eventually that's what most of the problems arise from. So they match all these things and they come up with one or two or three or four options. Usually it's a little male-dominated because if the boy is well educated, he gets to pick.

POLLICOFF: So Raghu, your family set this up. Shantha, what were you thinking?

SHANTHA: (laughing) It was a total surprise. I was 21 but in those days in India, once you turned 20, it was "Oh, well, it is time for you to get married." When they told me that I was going to meet him, I got a lot of background information in the sense that my paternal grandmother and his paternal grandmother knew each other.

They lived very close to one another. And then my father, when he was growing up, went to school with one of Raghu's uncles, and they were best friends. My parents had just come back to India to settle after my father retired, so I asked my mom, "How do you know them?" Then she told me all these things. She told me that when she used to go visit her in-laws she also visited Raghu's grandmother. My mom has three sisters and one of the sisters married into this family where there were a lot of brothers. One of them had a daughter who was my age and we used to meet when I came to India on visits. She and I sort of grew up together because we were about the same age. And she married Raghu's older brother. So I knew a person who was married to his brother! (laughing)

The first thing she said was, "He is Purushothaman's brother. And Vatsala is married to him." Vatsala is a cousin to my cousins on my father's side, so the whole family came to the house and that's how we met. She came back inside and asked me, "What do you think?" And I said, "Well, I never got to see him properly." So she went back outside and called him to come here. There was a mirror in the room I was in. "She says she has not seen you properly." So he stood in front of the mirror and said to me, "This is my front to you and this is my back to you."

RAGHU: I have a corny sense of humor!

SHANTHA: It was SO funny! (laughing) And then after that, we all sat down for tea. Typically in India they will say things like "Well, do you have anything to say to one another?" So they asked him that. He said, "I have a whole lifetime to ask her." And that was the end of that! So he had a great sense of humor.

POLLICOFF: Clearly, at your first meeting with her, you felt pretty comfortable because you already knew her background?

RAGHU: My mother and my sister have had very important roles in my life and I have trusted them. Their decisions have been impeccable. So I went with blind faith and trust. And after I finished graduation, I went to study in England, so I was like a first-round draft pick.

POLLICOFF: Why wouldn't she want me?

RAGHU: Yes! So if it's not her, I probably had three or four lined up.

POLLICOFF: So you weren't worried.

RAGHU: No, because I knew my mom, whatever she touches becomes gold. Not physically, not wealth-wise, but it turns out for the best.

POLLICOFF: So you already knew that and accepted that. It's pretty remarkable because you may have met other people you might have been interested in while you were in England, as well.

RAGHU: Yes. But because of our upbringing, there is a line that we don't cross. I was a bachelor in England. I was the entertainment secretary in the hospital. I arranged parties and all that. But there was a line that I never crossed.

POLLICOFF: And you, Shantha?

SHANTHA: I grew up in the Far East and went to a Catholic school, which was run by nuns. There was a boys' school next door, run by the Jesuits. We were allowed interaction, especially when we were in our last few years of high school. They didn't have what you call high school. It was O Levels and A Levels, which followed the British system. So there was a lot of interaction between the boys and the girls. We were all friends. But when I went to India and went to college, it was a culture shock for me. No one spoke to boys. We sat separately and if you even so much as looked at someone, it was a scandal! It was really difficult for me to adjust those first few years. After that, I got used to it. When my final year of college approached, the classes were very small because it depended on what your subject was. We were paired together to do experiments and things so there was more interaction between the boys and the girls. And when I started my B. Ed. training there was a lot more interaction because we went to observe each other teaching and things like that.

But as Raghu said, we had friends but we never looked at it as romantic. We never did the dating thing like they do here, or be set up for a date. We had lots of friends and maybe some who were better friends than others. Some of the boys in my class were married because they had come back to school after having worked a while.

POLLICOFF: What year were you married?

RAGHU: 1972. We've been married for 41 years now. We were married in Kerala, another state.

POLLICOFF: Were you practicing medicine at the time?

RAGHU: I was in England, undergoing higher studies, so I took her with me after we were married. Then I realized it was a small country and I could never become a consultant in England. Like in every country, they had prejudice. Being a consultant was a coveted job and you had to pass exams. But if an English boy, a Scottish boy and an Irish boy applied for the same job, the English boy got the job. If there were not English boys, the Scottish boy got the job. If there were no English or Scottish boys, then the Irish boy got the job. If none of them applied, then a very good foreign graduate got that job. But there were enough of them so that most of the Indian, Pakistani, Lebanese or whomever only got specialties that were not wanted by the mainstream English. So they got jobs in geriatrics, orthopedics, etc.

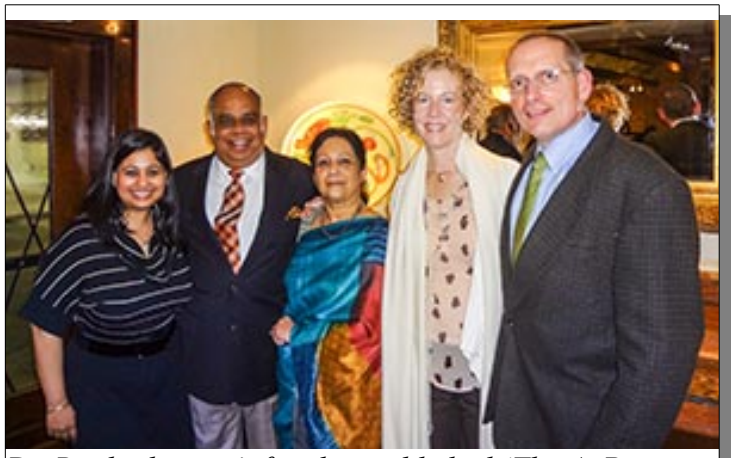
I said to myself, "This is not for me. I need to move." I applied to Australia, Canada, and the United States. And I got my job in Ohio as a resident in Medicine. So we packed up and left, in 1974. I was fascinated when I came to New York because they took us on a helicopter tour of New York to the airport. It was fascinating! We spent two years in Ohio and started talking about places. We wanted our kids to grow up in a big city but there is an American culture and an Indian culture. Youngstown, Ohio, was a small town. It was a capitol of crime more than anything else. It was 400 miles to New York and 400 miles to Chicago. The Mafia was big there. I didn't know all that then. And I was getting tired of the cold weather. England was bad enough, but Ohio was worse! Six months of scorching heat and six months of six feet of snow. So I applied for jobs in Arizona, Florida and Texas.

POLLICOFF: How did you decide on Texas?

RAGHU: It was the first one I got, and I took it!

POLLICOFF: What was the opportunity here?

RAGHU: It was awesome! I was the first Fellow in the U. T. Medical School to start the program in Gastroenterology. They had just opened up the spot in 1976.



Dr. Raghuthaman's family established 'The A. P. Raghuthaman, M. D. Fellowship in Gastroenterology' to support fellowships in advanced endoscopy as a gift to Raghu in 2014. Pictured (l-r) are Thara Raghuthaman Bala, M. D., Raghu's daughter, A. P. Raghuthaman, M. D., Raghu's wife, Shantha, and Julia and Dr. Michael Fallon, M. D.

The chairman was Dr. George Whalen who I still cover with. He is 80 years old now. My boss and I are still friends. I did a year of training at M. D. Anderson and a year at Hermann. I applied for a job at a diagnostic clinic. At that time, the Mexicans used to come with lots of money. It was fashionable for them to come to Houston, get a nuclear scan, a brain scan, and blood tests and go back and talk about it in their social circles.

When I went for a job and talked to the administrator, the first thing he asked me was, "Do you speak Spanish?" I said, "No". And he said, "We cannot give jobs to people who do not speak Spanish because we have a large clientele." I said, "In that case, I will practice on my own." He said, "I think it is going to be very difficult for you to practice here." I told him, "I've come 10,000 miles. I'm not going to give up now." So the next week I went to the Medical Center Bank and borrowed $100,000 and started practicing. I did not have to use any of that money because I went to every hospital and said, "I'm available." And I built up a huge practice and never had to use that money.

POLLICOFF: Did you have children when you were in Ohio? Had you started your family yet?

SHANTHA: Our son was born in Youngstown, Ohio, in 1975. When Raghu was doing his internship and residency, I started working as well. It was very strange when we first moved here (Ohio) because in those days, when the hospital gave you a residency, they put you up in a fully furnished apartment. When we came here there weren't any apartments ready. So they hosted us at the Howard Johnson's hotel. Our favorite pastime in the evening was to walk down to the parking lot and look at all those cars we had seen on television. We were SO impressed because we would watch these shows and see these HUGE cars. We would identify the Catalina and the Lincoln Continental that we had seen on shows. We were so afraid because we thought that people would shoot you if you walked down the street because the television shows were about hospitals and ERs and shows where people just gunned you down. Then Raghu started working and was put on call within three or four days after we arrived.

We didn't know anyone so I had to stay by myself in the hotel. I was scared! So I stayed in the room and didn't go anywhere because I was so scared that somebody would do something to me. The hospital took care of our expenses. We would go down and eat breakfast and lunch. We were so fascinated by those humongous sundaes that we would order them. We didn't know what 'dressing' meant. They would ask us, "What kind of dressing would you like on your salad?" We would look at each other, and then they would say, "Italian, Catalina, Roquefort."

So each time we would try a different kind of dressing. So he went off to work every day and I was in the room. I got hungry so I called room service and ordered. They knocked on the door, and of course I'm scared to open the door. I told him to leave the food outside. I heard him leave so I opened the door and pulled my tray in. When I finished, I put it back out. And I did that for all three meals, because I was so scared of going out.

Then we moved into the apartment and he would go to work. In those days long distance calls were expensive and we didn't have a TV because we didn't have any money to buy a TV. Raghu's resident was the senior resident, had older children, and they were from Florida. They became our friends and took us in as their friends. We became very close. They felt sorry for me because I didn't have a job. Raghu was on call every other night, no TV, no telephone, and no radio. So Carol brought me an old radio that had belonged to their children. It was in the shape of a Campbell's soup can.

Our mailboxes were downstairs so when the mailman came, I would run down to see if there was any mail. After a few days he would see me coming down when he parked the car. I would ask him if he had any letters. He looked at me and said, "Honey, you need to get on that bikini and go out to the pool." I thought to myself, "Why would I need to wear a bikini and go to the pool so I can receive a letter?" I did not understand. I didn't tell him that when he came back. Then I thought, "This is awful, so I'd better not go downstairs next time when he comes." So I would wait until he left before I would go down, because I wasn't going to go to the pool, wearing a bikini. I'd never even worn a swimsuit.

POLLICOFF: It was a bit of culture shock.

SHANTHA: Yes it was. Then I got a job and I started working as a medical technician, because I did my medical technology training in England.

POLLICOFF: At a hospital?

SHANTHA: No, this was a temporary job because someone else in the lab was on vacation. It was a two week thing. I used to wear a sari. In England, saris were accepted. And I always had a lab coat. But when I came to Youngstown, Ohio, they hadn't seen too many women wearing saris. So I would go to work in a sari and wear a lab coat. One Saturday morning the doctor's wife called me and said, "I have a lot of dresses that don't really fit me, and I can give them to you." I said, "Thank you very much but I don't think I need any." I didn't understand that she was trying to tell me she didn't think I should be wearing a sari to work. I worked in the lab. I was not in contact with patients. But that job was only two weeks.

Then I found another job, working in another doctor's office, with three doctors. Again, I wore my sari and my white coat. Everyone was very friendly. One day the doctor called me into his office and said, "This sort of dress is not acceptable. You cannot wear this and come to work." I said, "All right." Raghu was a resident and we were very careful about money because when we moved here, we didn't have many things. I told him I had to wear a white uniform, like a nurse would. So he took me to J. C. Penney's and I got myself the white uniform and I wore that to work.

POLLICOFF: How did you feel about that?

SHANTHA: Very uncomfortable at first. I grew up wearing Western clothes but when I went to England after living in India where I wore saris when I went to college, I wore saris to work, I wore saris going out. All our friends wore saris so it wasn't a problem.

POLLICOFF: But it was a hard transition to go back to wearing Western clothes.

SHANTHA: It was very hard. But I wore the white uniform to work and I worked in the doctor's office for about a year and a half, until I got pregnant. And then I left and stayed home with the baby. He was born in September of 1975.

POLLICOFF: How long were you in Youngstown before coming to Houston?

SHANTHA: Two years.

RAGHU: I left in 1976. The couple that helped us in Youngstown was in Florida for 14 years, so he was very comfortable here. He had a nice big car. My children's godparents were Carol (who died) ans Keith Kostoli. They were a wonderful Jewish couple. They used to invite us to their house for Passover. I didn't like the gefilte fish, though.

SHANTHA: When I was pregnant, Carol had a baby shower for me. I didn't even know what a baby shower was! They were the sweetest couple. I would babysit their children and then they got to taste Indian food. They liked some of the things I would make and they would ask me to make that for them. It was nice.

POLLICOFF: Where did you live in Houston before you ended up out here?

RAGHU: Shantha had gone to India with my son, Ramesh. That's when I got the fellowship. But she was not coming back so I had to pack up. I didn't know how to go about doing that.

They said Greyhound was the cheapest, so I packed all the bags, and shipped them to Houston on the bus. I flew to Houston. But we had to bring our car so when Shantha came, I had to go back and bring her down here. We got an apartment near the Medical Center. I put my name with an M. D. on it, and after about four weeks, my apartment was robbed. I think they were looking for drugs. We had gone out to see some friends. The way we would look for friends was we would take the yellow pages and go through the names. When we saw an Indian name, we would call them up.

POLLICOFF: You were working at M. D. Anderson?

RAGHU: Yes, and Hermann Hospital.

POLLICOFF: There should have been a few Indian doctors at that time, weren't there?

RAGHU: Very few. This was 1976. The U. T. School was just being built up. The new medical building had not been built yet. So the old Cullen Pavilion was the only building.

POLLICOFF: Did you feel more comfortable or less comfortable in the Houston area?

RAGHU: I was busy at work and I was happy at work. But when we got robbed, we decided we needed to move out of this place. We moved to Fondren Southwest to another apartment. We liked Fondren Southwest. Then in 1977 we decided to buy a house, in Missouri City, in Hunters Glen. We lived there for five years. During that time I had bought a lot in Memorial. I am a 'saver'; I save money. I decided I wanted to live well. All the other doctors were in private practice and they wanted to live in Memorial even though they had to travel to work. Memorial had real estate value and it was fashionable. I said to myself, "I want to be comfortable. I don't need to be fashionable." I wanted to practice at Memorial Southwest Hospital. Highway 59 was a two lane freeway. Galleria I was built and Westheimer was a dirt road past there. I wanted to be near the hospital and I liked Hunters Glen.

We came to Sugar Land and drove around. We looked at Sugar Lakes and Sugar Creek and we found a lot that Shantha liked in Sugar Creek, so we bought it, even though we still had the lot in Memorial that was almost paid for. So we built a home in Sugar Creek and we have absolutely loved it. We bought the lot in 1980 and started building in 1981 and moved in, in 1982. In 1979, our daughter, Thara, was born in Park Plaza Hospital.

POLLICOFF: When you were looking around, did you have friends out here at that time?

SHANTHA: No.

POLLICOFF: You were looking for an area that was easy for you to get back and forth to work, and be with your family?

RAGHU: Right. I thought the access to 59 was very good. At that time there were lots all over the place in Sugar Lakes and Sugar Creek. We actually put down money for a lot here, and then we saw another lot in Sugar Creek that she said, "That's better. Let's go there." She has a good eye for these things and I trust her judgment.

SHANTHA: When we moved to Houston, I got a job at the Medical Center. I worked at Ben Taub in the hematology department. Our son was still a baby then. There I was required to work on weekends. There was a system where you worked one Saturday and the next time you worked Saturday and Sunday, and then you got days off. But it was very difficult with Raghu's schedule. So I switched from Ben Taub to M. D. Anderson. There I worked in the lab medicine department, under Dr. Alexanian who was an authority on multiple myeloma. I was his lab tech. There my job hours were fixed. It was 8 to 5 so it was a little easier.

RAGHU: We had one car. So when I was a Fellow, I had to pick her and the baby up, drop them off in Hunters Glen, go back to make rounds and come home at 9 or 10 o'clock at night.

SHANTHA: Then our son developed very severe allergies and he was always sick. The day care center would not take him. I told Raghu that I didn't want to continue working, so that's when I quit, in 1977. Ramesh was not quite 2 years old.

RAGHU: We had a big argument. I said, "We haven't bought a vacuum cleaner yet. You cannot quit!" She said, "I am not going to work. I am going to take care of my child and be my own boss."

SHANTHA: So I went back to work in 2001 in Raghu's office. I do the books. The children are married now.

POLLICOFF: When you first moved in, did you feel comfortable living in Sugar Land?

RAGHU: Yes. Even in Hunters Glen we were comfortable. In fact there was another resident who lived across the street so we had very good friends in that neighborhood. When we moved to Sugar Land, gradually we picked up friends. We really love this place. I cannot tell you how much I love Sugar Land. I sold my lot in Memorial. Who was I trying to impress?

POLLICOFF: I'm curious about your looking in the phone book for other Indian names. You actually called people up - cold calls? Did you say, "I'm Indian. Are you? Would you like to get together?"

RAGHU: We could look at the name and say, "This guy is from South India. He speaks my language." In fact, we are still friends with some of those people we made friends with in 1976. Some of the partners have died. We used to play cards with them and got to know them pretty well. They were all so nice. They said, "Really? Can you come tomorrow?" And we'd go over there and they would treat us like family.

POLLICOFF: So in Houston, that's literally how the Indian community began, just through networking like that?

RAGHU: Right.

SHANTHA: When we lived in Hunters Glen, there were quite a few young Indian families there. So even though I didn't work, it was nice for the children. There were several people who lived down the street who had children about the same age. The mothers would get together during the daytime. It's now what they call a playgroup. We didn't organize a playgroup; we would just get together. The children would get together and play together. We didn't have to go outside, looking for playmates for them.

POLLICOFF: You didn't have extended family here so you had to create your own.

SHANTHA: Right. It was great living out there.

RAGHU: Some of them live in Sugar Lakes now, and we are still friends.

SHANTHA: As our children grew older, they formed new friendships. Our house in Sugar Creek is in a cul-de-sac and the homes were just being built when we moved in. So we got to meet all our neighbors. There were still a lot of empty lots. Our son had a lot of friends down the street. He would ride his bike over and they would play baseball on the empty lots. Every time there was a For Sale sign on the lot, they would remove the sign because they didn't want the lot to be sold!

RAGHU: Prabha Bala used to live in Glenshire and that's where we met them first, 31-32 years ago. Our daughter is married to Prabha's son, Vikram.

POLLICOFF: Was this an arranged marriage?

SHANTHA: No.

POLLICOFF: They don't listen to you guys any more, do they? (laughter)

RAGHU: It was a surprise to us! We couldn't have asked for a better alliance.

POLLICOFF: When you first came to Sugar Land in the late 1970s, there were only a few Indian families here. Is that correct?

RAGHU: That's correct.

POLLICOFF: When did that change?

SHANTHA: I think some of it changed with all the new construction, like the mall. When we moved here, it was a dirt road. There was nothing there. Then all this retail opened up. And when we lived in the apartment in Fondren Southwest, there were a lot of Indian families living in that neighborhood, in southwest Houston. That was the Houston Independent School District (HISD). A lot of them moved to Alief, and some to the Memorial area, because the Alief and Spring Branch school districts were the best at that time. When we moved to Sugar Land, we were zoned for Dulles. But Dulles at that time was bringing in a lot of students from Stafford and those areas. Our children started off going to a private school, Little Red Schoolhouse and Redbridge School. We liked the school very much and they had friends there, so they continued there. We carpooled with some other families who lived here. Then our son went to Strake Jesuit College Preparatory and our daughter went to Duchesne Academy of The Sacred Heart.

POLLICOFF: You both had a Catholic education?

SHANTHA: Yes. I went to an all-girls school and he went to an all-boys school. But we are Hindus. We like the structure of the Catholic schools. And I think a lot of people started moving to Sugar Land when they found out about the school system. Clements was built and other schools were built. That was a lot later, because by that time, our children were out of school. Our son graduated from Strake in 1994.

POLLICOFF: So you're saying you didn't see a dramatic change until the late 90s?

SHANTHA: I think it was the early to late 1990s.

RAGHU: Late 90s. In the late 1970s, and the first two or three years of the 1980s, Houston was boom town, USA. It attracted all the engineers. And Indians go into engineering or medicine. Parents push them into that. So this place had a lot of engineers.

The other reason for growth is, I was involved in this Meenakshi Temple Society in Pearland, which is a premier religious Hindu institution. Twenty-eight of us started it with $300 in 1977. We used to meet on weekends when I was off work. That's how we got to know a lot of people.

POLLICOFF: Even though there were a few families here, were there no other Hindu temples around for you to practice your religion?

SHANTHA: No.

POLLICOFF: I would assume there are a lot of engineers in the Pearland area because of NASA.

BOTH: Yes, and Clear Lake.

RAGHU: But the oil industry itself had a LOT of Indian engineers.

SHANTHA: There were more Indian engineers than there were Indian doctors at that time.

RAGHU: And then in 1984 or 1986, when oil went down to $10, most of these engineers opted for jobs in California or elsewhere. But the medical industry survived. Some of those who moved away, came back. And now, because of the weather and the schools they have brought in their relatives. So it is multiplying.

We talked to our friends in the north, and as you get older, the cold bothers you. They all said, "You guys are lucky to live there." I said, "Well, yes, we are." Our children were young and they used to say, "Dad, we live in the boondocks. We have to go downtown or somewhere else to see our friends." But fast forward 15 years and now their friends come to Sugar Land to have a good time. They want to go to Town Square, they want to go to Sherlock's Pub.

POLLICOFF: So you are finding the young people in their mid-to-late 20s and early 30s are coming back to Sugar Land?

RAGHU: Yes! In fact, when our daughter got married, they were debating about whether they should buy a house in Sugar Land or somewhere else. My daughter is still studying so they bought a house inside the Loop for convenience. But that was a big decision for them.

POLLICOFF: The shift that you've seen is very interesting and how it was related to the oil industry. But you're saying that the medical profession has really boomed through the 1980s and continues to be strong?

RAGHU: Yes. Subsequently, you can add nursing and other people have come in. But these were the coveted professions.

SHANTHA: And I think the information technology (IT) boom also. There are a lot of computer people.

POLLICOFF: And that's as Houston diversified with technology, medicine and oil?

RAGHU: Remember Compaq Computer? They attracted a lot of Indian people. In fact the reason for a lot of Indians in that area is because of Compaq Computer, which was bought by Hewlett-Packard.

POLLICOFF: So the Indian community was very small when you moved here in the late 1970s. Then it began to really boom in the mid-1990s?

RAGHU: After the mid-1990s, the Indian community in the southwest area really boomed. Most of the Indians live in the southwest area now.

POLLICOFF: In less than 20 years there was a significant demographic change, because of the schools, the businesses and the hospitals.

RAGHU: And what we admire about Sugar Land is how they have transformed and accepted us. And we are a voice in the community.

POLLICOFF: Tell me about that. When you first came here, was it difficult to find foods?

BOTH: Yes.

SHANTHA: I'm a vegetarian and there weren't many restaurants in Sugar Land when we came here. It was hard to get vegetarian food other than Chinese restaurants. There weren't that many Indian grocery stores either. So we always went into Houston, as far as the Hillcroft area to shop for groceries. Now we have so many!

We still drive to Pearland to go to the Temple but now there are other temples that we could go to in Stafford and on Eldridge. So it was difficult at that time for us, to get things that we wanted. But things have changed. A few years ago we even contemplated moving out of Sugar Land.

Our house is big and our children are gone. We want to travel. We thought we might get a condominium somewhere. Then Raghu would say, "No, we have all our friends out here. It's a nice city and we have everything." And I would think about it and say, "Well, if we bought a condominium downtown, I would still have to travel to the Indian store. Which I don't want to do!"

POLLICOFF: Are you finding more products available even at Kroger or Randalls?

SHANTHA: Yes!

RAGHU: We are so impressed with Whole Foods and HEB. They make the roti chapati in addition to the tortillas, the way we want them. It's phenomenal.

SHANTHA: And the big HEB even has paneer. I find HEB to be cheaper than the Indian store.

RAGHU: The first Indian restaurant in Houston was Maharaja. Prabha's husband, Bala, started it. They used to cook and serve. They closed it after a few months. It was in the Village. The second one was Tandoor with Satish Jhingran around 1976. He used to own it with his friends. This was in the early 1970s. [Editor's note: An article on the web quotes Prabha Bala, saying that Anil Kumar was a co-owner of Maharaja and it was open from 1975 – 1978 and "it was the first ever Indian restaurant in Houston", located at 2534 Amherst in the Rice Village.]

SHANTHA: Tandoor became Bombay Palace.

RAGHU: I owned India's Restaurant in 1982. It was a big thing for a doctor to be able to say, "I own this restaurant." It was a big ego trip. We lost money on it. That was okay.

POLLICOFF: Did you experience any prejudice?

RAGHU: I did, one time, in 1976-1978 — I don't remember exactly. I was driving around in my Oldsmobile. Some guy in a pickup truck, with his gun in the back, honked. I just looked at him, and put the window down. I thought he was going to ask me something. He called me the "N" word and said, "You need to go home." I wondered how I should react to this quickly. I said to myself, "He is ignorant. He does not know the difference between me and another race." So I didn't say anything. I just picked up my stethoscope and showed it to him. I knew he was not well educated. But that taught me something. After that, I've always been particular about having a nice car to drive and being well dressed.

There was one other incident involving a friend of mine, an allergist who lived in Memorial. He had a Mercedes and we were in his car, at night, after a party. So a cop randomly stopped us and wanted the ID of all of us. I was going to ask him why, but my friend said, "Just keep quiet." Then he told me, "This is Memorial. There are not that many Indians here. There are not that many Indians who drive a Mercedes around at night. So if they see a dark person driving a Mercedes at night, they assume that you have stolen the car." (laughs) We have prejudices too. We came from a country with prejudices against our own skin. That's how the caste system started. So I can accept that. I don't have to live with it but I know it exists. But much less now.

POLLICOFF: And what about with your children in school? Was there prejudice?

SHANTHA: Not really. There were a lot of Indian children and parents. But our son came home from school one day and asked what tribe he belonged to. When my son said he was Indian, one of the boys in his class said, "Whoo whoo whoo" using his hand. Ramesh looked at him and realized he didn't understand. One of the other boys said, "You are indian?" and Ramesh said, "Yes". That boy then said, "Oh, what tribe?" So when Ramesh asked me what tribe he belonged to, I said, "You don't belong to any tribe. Tell them you are from India and you are not an American Indian." So that was the end of that. He was in kindergarten or first grade.

RAGHU: They had Indian kids in the school but very few.

SHANTHA: When our daughter started in the same school, four years later, there were more Indian students then. When they went to school, they were accepted. They didn't have any problems. At Strake Jesuit, there were only two Indian boys in his class but it wasn't a problem. Thara was at Duchesne and they had almost an international student body.

RAGHU: When the kids started getting older, we used to have talks at home and I would tell Shantha, "As the children get older and as they leave, there is going to be a vacuum. You need to find something for yourself to do because in a few years, I don't want you to tell me you don't love me anymore. I'm going to do my thing and you're going to have a vacuum. Your vacuum is going to make you think you are not wanted." At that time she started doing social service work for the Fort Bend Women's Center.

SHANTHA: I started as a volunteer and then I was on the Board for many years. I still am, on the Council of Resources. I was a Board member of the American Heart Association, the East Fort Bend Chapter. I served on the Literacy Board for a couple of years. Then I found a calling and started Asians Against Domestic Abuse (AADA). I was involved with another organization but then I left it and formed Asians Against Domestic Abuse.

POLLICOFF: You must have seen a need for creating this organization within the Asian community. What was it?

SHANTHA: I used to volunteer on the hot line at the Houston Area Women's Center. There was an incident when I was there one afternoon. They got a call from someone and they could not understand the language. It was put on speaker and I told them, "That's Arabic." What the Houston Area Women's Center had was a language line connection to AT&T. So right away, they put this person on hold and connected her to the AT&T line. The minute the person came one, she hung up.

I had done all the training with the Fort Bend County Women's Center because I used to be a volunteer for them. One of the things that they tell us is that it takes a lot of courage for a woman to make that call. I was thinking how this woman had had the courage to make that call and then didn't get the help. It was really sad. That's when I felt there was a need. We had started another organization but that was just for South Asians. I wanted them to expand but everyone didn't share the vision and there were some internal politics, so four of us left. We got people from the community together and formed this organization. They come from Houston and the surrounding counties. And because I was so involved with Fort Bend County Women's Center, when we set up our voice mail, we have collaboration with them that from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m., our voice mail rolls over to the shelter. So there is someone there picking up the phone, even for our calls. Their hotline is manned 24 hours a day, unlike the Houston Area Women's Center, who transfer their line over to Crisis Intervention of Houston. And I was a volunteer with Crisis Hotline for two years and then shifted over here.

POLLICOFF: So does the Fort Bend Women's Center have people who speak Arabic?

SHANTHA: No. We provide that.

POLLICOFF: So they get a call and they say we have someone?

SHANTHA: They call us the next day. The police usually bring them to the shelter and they call us after the intake. I always tease them and say, "You must have my number on speed dial, because I'm the one who gets the call." They tell us they don't know what language this is. I try to find out. Sometimes I go there and try to meet the person.

POLLICOFF: You speak Arabic as well?

SHANTHA: No, but I understand what language it might be. Sometimes they tell us where they are from. Sometimes someone drops the woman off and tell the police where they are from. We had a case where there was a woman who came from Afghanistan. She spoke Farsi.

They couldn't do an intake, but she had a four-year old child who spoke English. The child explained things. She had been dropped off at the police station. So they called me and said she was from Afghanistan so I found someone from Baha'i Faith because some of them speak Farsi. She could not come to the shelter but I know where the shelter is. So I had to meet her at a place and get the form signed so I could take her to the shelter and she could interpret for us. That way they were able to do an intake. But it was really hard.

POLLICOFF: What year was this when you decided to create this organization?

SHANTHA: 2001 was when we started.

POLLICOFF: Obviously Asia encompasses a large area of the world. How did you reach out to some of the other groups, such as the Chinese, the Pakistanis, the Afghanis?

SHANTHA: When we started, we contacted all the women's centers and told them, "Here we are." What we do is fill the need in services because we felt at that time that these women were not able to get the help they needed, mainly because of the barriers of culture, language, and/or religion. The shelters that were there weren't able to help them the way they should. You can take them to the District Attorney's office and get a protective order or a restraining order. You can shelter them in your shelter. But simple things are difficult.

There was a woman who was in the shelter, from India, and she was a vegetarian. She was not eating, so they called me. I talked to her and she said, "You know I don't eat meat." I told them she was a vegetarian and couldn't eat meat. They got her Campbell's Vegetarian Soup. But that has chicken or beef broth in it. It's not pure vegetarian.

When she refused to eat that, they called me and said, "You said that she could eat soup." I said, "Yes, but what did you buy?" "We got Campbell's Vegetarian soup." I told them, "Unfortunately it is made with chicken broth." She would eat cereal and rice and things like that. Sometimes we would take her food and they didn't mind our doing that. So this was some of the things we did to educate the shelters.

We also told them that when a Muslim woman goes in, they eat halal meat, which is very similar to kosher. So we told them that whatever they do for women who eat kosher food, that's exactly what they need to do for them. So they understood that. These were some of the barriers that we tried to break.

POLLICOFF: So you were literally working with all the women's centers throughout the region?

SHANTHA: Yes. It was the same thing with the Houston Area Women's Center, Fort Bend, and Montgomery County. So they call us when they have these women in there who don't speak the language.

POLLICOFF: Do you have paid staffers or is it strictly volunteers?

SHANTHA: Our advocates are all volunteers. We have one part time paid staff person who manages things. Two years ago we moved into the Chinese Community Center so we have two rooms there that we use.

POLLICOFF: And where is that located?

SHANTHA: In 'Chinatown', on Town Park Drive. In 2005 we opened in a huge office space that a gentleman gave us. But we didn't need that much space and he kept increasing our rent. He tried to get us out of there because he wanted to charge more rent. It wasn't a safe neighborhood so we didn't feel comfortable there and it was not on a bus route. So we moved to the Chinese Community Center. We have always collaborated with them and we felt the move would be really good for us and our clients. They had English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, they helped with food stamps and the gold card, and every 3rd Wednesday of the month they have lawyers come from the Houston Volunteer Lawyers Association, for free consultations.

POLLICOFF: As international as Fort Bend County and Houston have become, I'm sure that, unfortunately, this need has grown greater.

SHANTHA: Yes. The only problem is a lot of it is still hidden.

POLLICOFF: It's not socially or culturally acceptable?

SHANTHA: Exactly. It's like what happened in the United States many years ago. You did not want to air your dirty laundry in public. It's a very hidden secret. But as we do more awareness, people call.

Our message on our voice mail is, "Leave us your name and number in the language of choice and the time that it is safe for us to call you." But they hang up. It takes about 2 or 3 hang-ups before you get a message from someone.

POLLICOFF: It takes a lot of courage to make that call.

SHANTHA: It does. And then when you call them, they may not pick up. So it's not an easy thing. We are out there, helping them but it takes time. And they also stay with us for a longer period of time. Sometimes they will go into a shelter, come out, we'll help them with financial assistance for rent, but they'll still stay on. So sometimes we'll have a client who is with us for two years before she can really become independent. Some of them are not educated; they don't speak English; they don't have a job; they don't have a car. So they are very isolated. So we work with apartment owners. For people who come from the East Asian community, we try to find them an apartment in that neighborhood. At least they can walk down to the neighborhood grocery store. They will see people who look like them, who speak their language. We do the same thing with the South Asians. And we try to find apartments that are on a bus route.

POLLICOFF: I know one of the issues that all immigrants have is assimilation. When you came, you felt isolated and afraid when you were in Youngstown. But that gradually changed as you met more people and worked in the community. Raghu, you didn't appear to feel that way because you had a job.

RAGHU: Yes. And the reason for the fear particularly in Youngstown was that in England at that time, there was a general opinion that Americans were violent. It's the old British attitude. So we were fed that information and we came with that fear. It really wasn't all that violent.

POLLICOFF: But you didn't have a language barrier since you both spoke perfect English.

SHANTHA: No, we didn't have the language barrier.

RAGHU: There are gradations of acceptance, depending on how much you put into the system. If somebody wants to come into my house, I would like them to appreciate what I have. If they come and just criticize me, I'm going to get them out of my house.

POLLICOFF: So as you moved into Houston and then Missouri City and Sugar Creek, what was that feeling of assimilation for you? Did you feel as though you had abandoned any of your customs?

SHANTHA: No.

POLLICOFF: You continued to be vegetarian. You continued to practice your religion and formed the temple. How did you balance that assimilation in wanting to be a part of the broader community?

RAGHU: It's a constant reminder within yourself that not everything Indian is necessarily 'right'. Not everything American is necessarily 'wrong'. There is good in each one. You get to choose. And that's what we told our children as they were growing up. We never prejudiced their minds, about marriage for example. I said that just because they are Indian, they aren't necessarily nice. Just because they are American, they aren't necessarily bad. Our son married an Indian girl but now he's going through a divorce. And when we tell our friends, our friends say, "I've gotten a lot of my children to marry Indians." They have children who have married Americans or whatever.

POLLICOFF: So there is divorce in the Indian culture?

BOTH: Oh, yes.

RAGHU: The younger people, yes.

SHANTHA: And in India, too?

RAGHU: Yes, we balanced it. There were some things we didn't like, some things we learned to accept.

POLLICOFF: How did you insure they adopted or became familiar with their Indian customs?

SHANTHA: We had a good network of friends. We all got together to celebrate our festivals. The children always got together, too, and learned about it. We took turns getting together in each others homes or we did potluck. Everyone was very comfortable with that.

When they went out, they had Indian friends and they had American friends. So it wasn't a problem. We also celebrated things like Christmas, but not Easter and all that. We didn't look at it as a Christian holiday but more of social celebration.

RAGHU: We put up Christmas trees in our house. We had gifts under the tree.

SHANTHA: We still do. Our daughter puts up the tree in her home. We gave them both. I think the school atmosphere also helped. I know when my daughter was at Duchesne, they were very accepting of her religion.

In fact, for one of their Thanksgiving masses, they had asked the students to bring their holy scriptures, and she took her book. There was a Koran, there was a Bhagavad Gita, there was a Bible. Our daughter also learned Bharatanatyam, which is a classical dance; she learned singing also.

The year before she had her debut, she went to Virginia where she was in a camp for three weeks, which was conducted by dance teachers from India. Girls came from all over the United States to this camp. It was the best experience ever for her because she found there were a lot of people like her, Indian, here in America, all here to learn dance. She came back and told us some hilarious stories.

POLLICOFF: They were comfortable in their skin.

SHANTHA: Yes.

RAGHU: There are a lot of Indian kids growing up in this country as we speak, who are very comfortable as Indian-Americans but they are American first and Indian second. If you ask them if they would like to go to India and live there, they say, "Heck no!" But they are Indian here.

POLLICOFF: Is that good or bad?

RAGHU: That's good. Because they have now assimilated and added another spectrum into this big melting pot.

SHANTHA: Going back to India also depends on if you have friends or family there. Our daughter loves to go to India because she has friends in India. Friends who went to school with her because she graduated from Duchesne and then went to Smith. When she was at Smith she had friends who had come from India to Smith as students, and then went back to India. She also has family there.

But what attracts her is that she has friends there, girls who grew up here or went to school here with her, or lived here and gone to college here, and then gone back to India. They are able to show her a different part of India – the clubs, the bars, theater. All the things that young people like. I used to spend every summer in India with the children when they were little. Our son had very severe health problems. He was allergic to mosquito bites; he had asthma so the dust was very bad for him and he had to wear a mask. These were very negative things for him in his growing up stage. Because of that, he feels that it is difficult and he does not like India that much.

RAGHU: And we don't push it.

SHANTHA: We don't push it.

RAGHU: At work, I did not find any prejudice at all. All that mattered was that I worked hard.

POLLICOFF: With your patients or with your colleagues?

RAGHU: Initially I didn't get a lot of referrals from redneck Americans. Then when I started working, one or two doctors started using me. One of them is still a buddy of mine. He was the Chief of Staff. When he would send his patients to me, the patients would ask, "Can he speak English?" And he would tell them, "He speaks better English than you do." I had patients come in and see me, and I can kind of sense in a flash that they are worried I won't be able to understand them. So I speak to them for a few sentences continuously so they know I am able to express myself very clearly and they can be comfortable in expressing themselves. Then I sit down and say, "Tell me." I've had a huge practice since then. Now I'm toning it down. I don't want to be too busy now.

POLLICOFF: So it didn't have as big an impact because of the effort you put into it.

RAGHU: Yes.

POLLICOFF: Do you feel like your children will carry on their Indian traditions and customs?

RAGHU: There will be some parts of it that will be lost but that's okay. They'll keep the core parts.

POLLICOFF: But you feel comfortable that they have that appreciation for where they came from?

SHANTHA: They do.

RAGHU: Yes. They are very proud of it.

SHANTHA: They are very proud of it and they will keep their religion. That's something they won't lose.

POLLICOFF: Let me go back to the Temple. How many families went in to start it?

RAGHU: Twenty-eight of us in 1977.

POLLICOFF: And how big is it now?

RAGHU: The Temple is probably 16 acres, with 600-700 members. These are the members who have voting privileges. Anybody can become a member – it's an open thing. There are a huge number of people who come to visit.

POLLICOFF: It's a beautiful place.

RAGHU: Thank you. We have brought some of our bad habits with us. We are not as clean as Americans are.

POLLICOFF: In what way?

RAGHU: We don't pay attention to the details. They would walk around in the Temple and throw a cup, which the average American would not do – they would put it in the trashcan. This is the first generation, the bad Indianism, that needs to be corrected. And the younger people need to correct it also. And sometimes in the Temple they come dressed very sloppily. An American would not go to a church or synagogue in shorts and a tank top. So we need to educate our children to be reasonable.

POLLICOFF: In business, too, there's been a decline in how one dresses. But that always shifts back.

RAGHU: The Temple has been a strong force in keeping the families together, having the festivals. Just feeling that you are not alone in the world, doing what you are doing.

SHANTHA: Our children have been involved in the sense that we have taken our children from the time they were very young. Our daughter has had major milestones celebrated at the Temple. Their sixth month is when we feed them rice for the first time.

She used to sing for some of the festivals. Her debut was before she performed at the Temple for her dance. Her engagement, her wedding. Everything was celebrated at the Temple. So it's been a part of their lives.

POLLICOFF: With the wedding, was everything held at the Temple?

SHANTHA: The main ceremony, the religious ceremony, was held at the Temple. Then we had a reception outside the Temple because the reception was more American style. At the Temple we don't serve meat or alcohol. So we had a very traditional wedding with a very traditional lunch. Then we had a reception in the garden at Bayou Bend, with cake and champagne.

POLLICOFF: So at the reception you also had meat?

RAGHU: Yes. A lot of Hindus don't eat beef so we didn't serve steak, but we served lamb and chicken.

SHANTHA: And we had a DJ and they all danced.

RAGHU: It was a typical Indian wedding.

SHANTHA: What was nice to see was some of her friends who came for the wedding actually borrowed saris to wear to the ceremony. Some of them bought special clothes to wear to the reception. It was beautiful. One of our close friends, Susan, went out and bought an outfit to wear to the reception.

POLLICOFF: Those kinds of things are now commonly available in this area. There's more than just the Sari Palace on Hillcroft!

RAGHU: Asking about prejudice, Shantha you should talk about your conversation about Junior League.

POLLICOFF: Are you a member of the Junior League?

SHANTHA: No. I was a member of the Houston Junior Forum. At the Junior League, maybe five or six years ago, I was invited by Lisa at Southern National Bank, to come to a luncheon. I think it was a fundraiser for something. They had put on a show of Victorian fashions with huge skirts and things. Afterwards, I was standing with a group of ladies I had met and there was one woman there I had never met before.

When I was introduced to her, I commented on the fashions, and said how beautiful they were and what a nice fashion show it was. She said, "Well, those were Victorian fashions but you wouldn't know anything about that." And I said, "Excuse me? But I have studied American history." And she kept quiet. She wasn't a Junior League member but was one of the people from Fort Bend County.

In 2008, we had our annual fundraiser luncheon, which was held at the Stafford Center. Normally when we have our luncheon for AADA, we always have something very different that sets us apart. That luncheon was called Harmony, a Cultural Celebration. What we did was we had a fashion show showing all the different outfits from different parts of Asia. We also had dancers. I got these dancers from the Buddhist Temple. They were beautiful young girls and they performed. There was someone in the audience who remarked that the gestures they were making looked very vulgar and were not appropriate. It was just hands and they had long nails! She commented that it was not Christian. Well, they were Buddhists! So after that, I organized a 'thank you tea' for all the volunteers and it was very close to Diwali. By that time David Wallace was the Mayor and he had started celebrating Diwali in Sugar Land, outside of City Hall. Everyone knew what Diwali was – most people do. If you look at the community calendar, you will see all these festivals listed there.

So I put on the invitation to come celebrate The Festival of Lights and have a cup of tea. She called a few of the people and said, "This Celebration of Light is not appropriate. We should not go." And they didn't come to my house! This was 2008. So there is still a bit of that. When someone told me about it, I said, "That's ridiculous. They Mayor of Sugar Land celebrates Diwali. And not only that, he has a huge menorah in front of City Hall for Hanukkah. We celebrate all the festivals here in Sugar Land."

POLLICOFF: So even today you see some prejudice?

SHANTHA: Rarely.

RAGHU: Very rarely and very isolated.

SHANTHA;: Very isolated incidents but I think there are some people who are very staunch believers in their faith and you cannot change them.

RAGHU: You can't blame them. There is prejudice everywhere.

SHANTHA: It exists among the Indians as well.

RAGHU: The rich don't like the poor. There is segregation of some sort in every way. There is segregation against Muslims because people fear every Muslim is Jihadi. That is just untrue.

POLLICOFF: Have you heard the statement that sometimes we hold on to our traditions stronger because we fear losing them?

BOTH: Yes.

POLLICOFF: Does that resonate with you?

BOTH: Yes.

RAGHU: To be honest with you, I have told my children, as they were growing up, that if you marry a Muslim, I will still love you as my son or daughter. But it will be very difficult. It will set us far apart. You will still be my son or daughter and we will still love you. But the effects of love flourish when the relationship is closer. So anything that you or I do to create that distance makes a difference. I've always said it is very hard to have two religions under one roof. Do you know who told me that? An elderly Jewish lady patient of mine. I absolutely loved her!

SHANTHA: It's hard enough when you speak different languages.

RAGHU: (laughing) It's hard enough when everything is the same!

SHANTHA: I used to have long conversations with our daughter. I would also tell her, "You know, in a marriage it is very difficult to adjust, but you have to try and adjust and meet somewhere, halfway." That itself is difficult, so you can imagine when the culture is different, the religion is different, the language is different. It will be very difficult. And one of the things in Indian marriages, we don't marry just the individual. It's a family. It is so important to have that support of the family and that is something that we have always told the children.

POLLICOFF: One thing we haven't talked about. I know you have friends from many cultures. Is there is a difference in the way you celebrate events in your own home when you have your Indian friends as opposed to your more diverse friends, such as the things you eat or the way you eat?

RAGHU: Yes, there is. When we have traditional Indian friends over, we have traditional Indian food. We wash our hands and sometimes eat with our hands. When we have multi-cultural people, it's always fingers foods, hors d'oeuvres, or forks. It's very difficult for them to come to our house and they see us eat with our hands, they wonder, "Do I have to do that? I don't know how to do that. I don't like to do that." So why put them in that situation?

POLLICOFF: Did it ever create a problem or a funny situation in the early days after you first moved here?

SHANTHA: No.

RAGHU: The only thing is I think our foods are very spicy for the non-Indian people, so we learned to tone it down.

SHANTHA: We leave the eating with the hands as an option. You can have a fork or if you want to eat with your hands, that's fine. We give them the option. We don't insist that food tastes better if you eat with your hands.

RAGHU: Our children don't usually eat with their hands. They were born and brought up here.

SHANTHA: Some do, sometimes. It's not something we impose on anyone. And some of our friends like Indian food. If we invite them, they will ask, "Are you going to make Indian food?"

RAGHU: One of the core messages from us to you to take is that we are very impressed with the way Fort Bend County and Sugar Land have planned its expansion and its acceptance of different kinds of people. I think that's a wonderful thing. Schools, library, roads, the cleanliness, the facilities, Town Square, the way it is all laid out. The big stores want to come here.

POLLICOFF: The respect for the diversity?

BOTH: Yes.

POLLICOFF: I think you said that you've seen a lot of your friends' children have come back and are thinking about buying homes in Sugar Land. And your own children, too. Do you see that continuing? Do you think there is something we need to do to make sure that continues?

RAGHU: I think the way they are going now, they are on the right path, because they are catering to every age in different ways, and nicely. The advantages of the tax base has also improved, with the Indians and Asians coming in. They do pay a lot of taxes. I think there is good representation in the schools now. I think they need to make the schools very secure. One thing that Indian parents are concerned about is the education for their children. That is primary in our hearts. I don't care if I die a pauper as long as my children are educated.

POLLICOFF: By security, you mean the quality of the education?

RAGHU: Yes, the quality of the education. I think if the schools start having violence or segregation or teachers who are not qualified or teachers who do not respect the different ethnicities, that will be a problem for the public schools. Then the private schools will completely take away all of this. When that continuously moves, newcomers won't go.

Newcomers look for schools, convenience to work, and cost of living. Having the Rockets and the Texans and all that is okay for the businessman. It's a corporate game. Nobody moves in here because of that. Most of the middle class/upper middle class families move to Texas looking for good schools, safe neighborhoods and then the conveniences.

SHANTHA: And I also think the retail businesses, the bigger grocery stores, have really gone out of their way, especially the new ones, to incorporate food that the ethnic groups will buy.

RAGHU: We live in Sugar Creek and Gerlands was there for years. Then Beldens came in and stayed only a short time. Then Gerlands took it back from Beldens. Then Gerlands closed. Now the new Fiesta marketplace is opening next week.

POLLICOFF: And do you think it will have much more Indian food?

SHANTHA: Oh yes. We were actually part of their focus group. We were asked for a lot of ideas. So I told them what we find in HEB and what we would like to see. I think they are going to do all sorts of things in that store.

RAGHU: And not just Indian. Asian as well. Indians don't necessarily go out and eat Indian food all the time. We always eat Mexican food and Chinese food. (laughing)

POLLICOFF: Besides the grocery stores and restaurants, are there other types of businesses it would be good to have that would cater to the Indian population or they would be happy it came in?

SHANTHA: I don't know. But I would like to say one thing. I don't know how the libraries do things but I think as we grow out here in Fort Bend, I think the libraries should also focus on all these various celebrations and get some books on those celebrations. That way people could learn about these celebrations and customs. I feel it might be a way of bridging that gap. For example, the City of Sugar Land has the Kite Festival and that is beautiful. We have a Kite Festival.

POLLICOFF: It actually spans several cultures.

SHANTHA: Now that they celebrate Diwali or mentioning the date, if the library had books on what these things are, I think people would really begin to understand and know what it is and it wouldn't be so strange any more. I think a lot of times prejudice is because of ignorance.

RAGHU: I think even more than libraries. If the news media in general had a short segment during the appropriate time of Diwali, just a little flash of it, would be helpful. Like, tonight, in downtown, the Hare Krishna movement is doing a chariot show.

SHANTHA: Three chariots. This one is a collaboration with several other Indian temples, held at Discovery Green.

RAGHU: So if the news media could show this type of thing, just as they show Chinese New Year, with little blips here and there. Then people would get to know there are other people who do this kind of thing.

POLLICOFF: Is there anything else we haven't talked about that you think is important?

RAGHU: We've talked a lot!

POLLICOFF: If there is something that you think of, we can add it into this conversation. If you have any photographs or documents that would help with this history, we would love to copy them if you wouldn't mind sharing some of that.

Interview ends