

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Satish G. Jhingran**

Interview Date: 07/13/2013

Interviewer: Amy Pena

Transcriber: Carlos Rubalcaba

Location: Sugar Land, Texas

10 Pages



This oral history is copyrighted 2018, by the Fort Bend County Historical Commission. All Rights Reserved. For information contact: Fort Bend County Historical Commission, Attn: Chairman-Oral History Committee, 301 Jackson St., Richmond, TX, 77469.

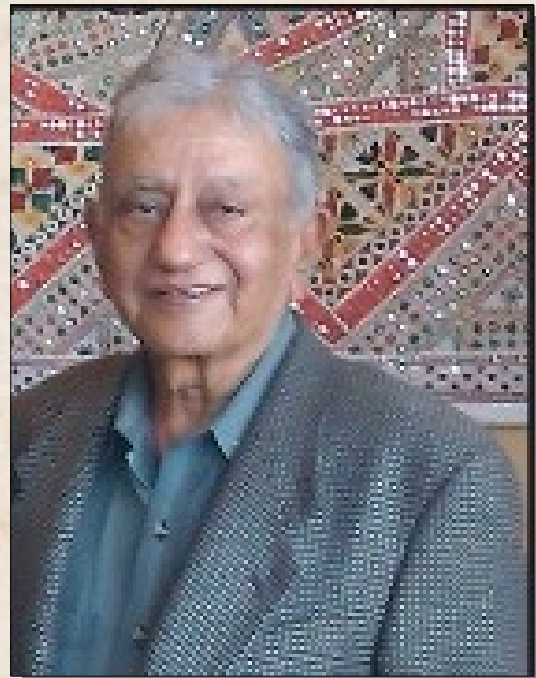
Terms and Conditions

These oral histories do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the County Historical Commission or Fort Bend County. This file may not be modified or changed in any way without the express written permission of the Fort Bend County Historical Commission.

This file may not be redistributed for profit.

Please do not 'hot link' to this file.

Please do not repost this file.



Transcript

PENA: Could you give us your date of birth please?

JHINGRAN: December 2, 1935.

PENA: Where do you live in Fort Bend County and when did you arrive?

JHINGRAN: I live in First Colony, Sugar Land. I arrived in the year 1986 or 1987. But I have been living in Houston since 1967.

PENA: Would you tell us the story of how you came to America and how you came to be in Texas.

JHINGRAN: I was a physician back in India, in academic life. I wanted to get some specialization in something. Nuclear medicine was a brand new topic not only in India but all over the world. I had some training in Bombay for three months and they told me to go to this county, USA, to get advanced training. So I applied for a fellowship and a guy in Bombay told me to apply to Houston. He had a friend here in Baylor at M. D. Anderson who was in charge of Nuclear Medicine so I applied here. I got in, came in July of 1968 as a fellow in Nuclear Medicine at M. D. Anderson Cancer Hospital.

When I came here there were a lot of restrictions on carrying money. The government of India only allowed me \$8.00 to come from India to Houston.

PENA: That's quite a restriction!

JHINGRAN: There were a lot of restrictions. They didn't want any foreign currency to go out because it was a socialist country and at that time they had the financial crunch. So I came from Tokyo to here. Actually the plane in Tokyo came to Houston in the night. Somebody came and received me at the airport, and brought me to a hotel close to the medical center. The next day I had an orientation at M. D. Anderson and after the orientation they asked, "Any questions?" There were two of us, both Indians, but the other guy was from the United Kingdom (UK). The UK also had a lot of restrictions so he didn't have any money either. We said, "We need money to stay at the hotel and eat." They said, "Well, this has not happened before. We can't give you your salary in advance but what we can do is make you a member of the credit union right now and we will give you a loan from the credit union." So on day ONE I took the loan, like the American consumers (chuckle) and since then I have always been in debt.

PENA: (laughing) You became an American right away didn't you?

JHINGRAN: I left the Indian culture to live in debt. We got the loan and then we settled down. My wife came six months later. For the first six months I was in a dorm at the Medical Center and then we moved to the apartments, which are known as Parkwood Apartments. They were pretty close to M. D. Anderson; actually right now the Baylor College of Medicine is there. They were fantastic apartments. I used to walk from there. Then I bought my car before my wife came and I had the first accident with that car before she came so I could not bring her back from the airport. I took a friend to take her from the airport. It was real hot sun there that day in Houston. Somebody stopped and he said, "You are walking, what's the problem? Nobody walks here." He was an Indian guy too. He took me in his car, we got the groceries in back and through him I got into these apartments. That was a big help at that time. Then he became my close friend; he has moved from here to UK. His wife was a French woman.

PENA: What was this man's name?

JHINGRAN: He was from Flout, India; his last name was Dr. Menon. He was Indian but his wife was a French woman.

PENA: He was also a physician?

JHINGRAN: Yes, he was working close by in the Veterans Administration V. A. Hospital.

PENA: He was the first Indian that you met?

JHINGRAN: First acquaintance I had, yes. Although at that time at M. D. Anderson there were two or three more Indians who joined as fellows. So that's how I was introduced and then I bought a car. The first day I was driving my car, brand new car, a Renault. I learned how to live in America so quick (laughing). I am driving the first day after taking the driving lessons. I was just driving the car straight back from the shopping area and hit my car. It was smashed on one side actually. I was scared to death, so I did not even stop. I had no idea what the rules were or that I needed to stop. I was nervous like a rat. I came back to my dorm in the medical center, then I got out of the car and then I saw the whole side is gone, I mean it's plenty damaged. I don't know what to do. I called my friend, Dr. Menon. He said, "Call your insurance agent." I called my insurance agent and really I was crying, my new car I just bought it and I don't know what to do. He looked at me (laughing) and saw me crying and he said, "You know, Dr. Jhingran, we should not pay you anything, it's your fault. You should have stopped and taken the information and everything, but looking at you, I sympathize with you. I'll try to get the car repaired through our company."

I don't have my car five days, by that time my wife was here. Dr. Menon took me to the airport and I had two children at that time, you know kids, one was about three years old the other was six years old. By the time my wife came we moved to the Parkwood Apartments and finally, gradually settled down.

Houston was very small at that time. As a matter of fact the City of Houston was nothing after Loop 610. There was no Westheimer no Galleria, nothing. One of my friends took me to the Jewish community center he said was in Braeswood and it was far out. To me it was a long distance (chuckling) and absolutely nothing there. There was no Indian grocery at that time, absolutely nothing. It was a sad place which was known as Antoine where you could get some foreign goods so we went there.

We didn't find very much. My wife was completely vegetarian and I was actually a vegetarian. I used to eat meat off and on maybe once in one month or so. So we had a problem. After three or four years there were more Indian people who came here, so we found a group that we could order our groceries from New York in bulk. The rice and the legumes and everything, boxes and then we would just distribute it ourselves.

PENA: About what year was this?

JHINGRAN: It was 1971, 1972. But let me tell you one more thing at that time, that's very interesting. When I was coming from India, I told friends, "I am going to Houston." People had been to America but they had not been to the South, none of them whom I knew. There were some stories about the South at that time about black discrimination. But when I came here in 1968, the discrimination was gone. I was scared but people were very friendly, very helpful. Every one of them as a matter of fact. Now I don't see that which I saw in sixty-eight. People are much more friendly and helpful, all Americans. My children went to public school at that time and absolutely no feeling of discrimination.

PENA: And now it's different?

JHINGRAN: Now that the discrimination part it is not there. No, I am not saying the people are not that helpful not friendly, now it's a big town, you know. Big town like in New York, everybody is busy now, here everybody is busy. At that time it was a small town, lazy town, easy town.

You go to New York and everybody is rushing and all those things. I had a very good time here; then after three years of my fellowship at M. D. Anderson, I moved to Baylor College of Medicine and Methodist Hospital. I spent all 31 years there, 1961 to 1971. I was at M. D. Anderson from 1971 till 2001. I was at Methodist at Baylor College of Medicine; I was the chief of Nuclear Medicine there. In 2001 I was sixty-five years old at that time.

How long you have been in Houston?

PENA: All my life.

JHINGRAN: All your life, so you know that great floods came to the medical center and everything was flooded. My department was in the tunnel, the whole lab department was in the tunnel, was all flooded, everything was gone. I thought, "I'm already sixty-five and this must be an indication for me to move on. Move from here now (chuckle). We had established that lab and it was a big department by that time. I retired from there.

PENA: You retired after the flood?

JHINGRAN: In 2001 I retired. I was working part time. In the meantime we moved from those apartments to an area known as Glenshire, which is at Bellfort and Gessner. It's still there, nice houses. I bought my first house there, brand new house. We stayed there for about ten years. Then in around 1986 or '87 I moved to Sugar Land. First Colony was a very small place. I had heard about Sugar Land before due to the sugar mills and all those things.

But I had no idea where Sugar Land was at that time. Somebody in the area had told me that they are building new houses in First Colony. They are building a street of dreams there, they are making about ten or eleven houses at that time. So I thought, "Well, lets go and see." I was looking for a house to move out from Glenshire in 1986. So we went and saw the builder. There was no house at that time. He showed me the plot and I really liked the plot. Just buy a plot and we signed the contract with him. The guy is dead now, that builder. It came out to be a beautiful house and the street of dreams, he won the first prize on that house. There are thousands of streets just for that. The place where I live is just across from the county club, Sweetwater Country Club. So we moved there and we loved and we enjoyed it.

At that time First Colony was a wilderness, frankly. Sweetwater Country Club was there and that Sweetwater Street was there but beside that there was nothing there. I think Clements was there or maybe it may not be, I'm not sure. I think it was there, but beside that there was nothing, no lights, nothing. There were only stop signs there. We could see the deer walking, running, a lot of wild life, raccoons and everything, snakes. It was a fantastic place at that time to live there. Since then this area has developed. All the amenities are here now so we don't have to go out of this place.

PENA: (chuckle) That's right. If I could go back to 1971, 1972 when you were ordering your groceries from New York...how long did you have to do that before you got...?

JHINGRAN: I'll say about three, four or five years after that an Indian store opened up. Well, the Indian businessman opened his store so we got the stores from there. We had at that time very few Indians so we had not too much society.

We gradually built it up...there were students, you know, but as professionals there were very few people. The University of Houston had a small Indian association. They were showing movies once a week or once a month, I think it was once a month, so we used to go and see Indian movies there. Then we gradually formed our association there and so we moved off.

I was pretty active at that time in the civic life of the Indians. I became president of the Indian Culture Center. Gradually there were a lot of Indian doctors, too. We formed an Indian Doctor Association and an Indian Doctors Club that was not there at that time. I was one of first presidents of that and then we formed the Charity Foundation; I was one of the founders of that American Charity Foundations. So I have been very active.



Indian Cultural Center (ICC) President Col. Raj Bhalla (left) with the Election Commission Officers Ashok Dhingra, Koshy Thomas and Dr. Satish Jhingran, December 29, 2011.

--courtesy of www.indoamerican-news.com

PENA: I want to ask about your family.

JHINGRAN: When we came one was six years old. To start with, we sent her to a Montessori school close by so that she can learn to speak English and learn everything.

PENA: So she didn't speak any English at all when she came?

JHINGRAN: No, she knew how to write it but speaking was different. She could not speak very much and the same thing with my wife. I mean, she could understand English, she was a graduate from there. But still understanding and speaking was not that easy.

There was a ladies church association at that time that was teaching foreigners how to speak English, how to understand and all those things. My wife went to that church and she learned how to speak. There she met another Indian women and later on they became close friends.

PENA: You mentioned, of course, there were so few Indian people. How did you find a place to worship?

JHINGRAN: Worship. To start with after two or three years, there were a few more Indians than what we used to have at that time. In the evening once a week we used to meet and just worship ourselves and read the holy scripture, the Indian scriptures at that time.

There was no Indian temple at that time. Then we formed a society in the worship society and we built our first temple. I don't remember the year when we went in the worship society. I was one of the founders of the Hindu Worship Society, too. That temple is still there. That is the oldest temple here.

There are fifteen or twenty temples now; that was the first temple to be built in Houston. There were no Indian restaurants so we opened a restaurant.



Dr. Satish Jhingran receives an award from Indo American Charity Foundation President Nanda Vura (left) and Sushvon Guha, IACF Board Director, December 15, 2016

--courtesy www.indoamerican-news.com

In the late 1970s it was the first restaurant in Houston, actually in the state of Texas. We opened the first Indian restaurant. I was one of the partners of that. We were five partners and we opened The Bombay Palace on Westheimer and Richmond. It was the only Indian restaurant in the state of Texas. We did very well as a matter of fact. The name at that time was Tandoor, the restaurant name.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read the Ayyam and Shantha Raghuthaman interview on this website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=45444>

PENA: I think I remember that name.

JHINGRAN: You might, that was the first restaurant, and it was very popular. We ran that restaurant for five years, then we got a buyer from New York, an Indian guy. He bought it, he gave us good money and then he changed the name to Bombay Palace which was there until recently. It has changed to Karan. But at the time that was a novelty just like the Indian grocery store first started here. That was a big thing, and what's the name who started it? Jass Store. So those are the stores and then regularly we were showing movies also every month. Collecting some money for the Indian Culture Center.

PENA: You said earlier that you didn't feel like there was any discrimination.

JHINGRAN: Nothing.

PENA: Were you urged to blend in, did you feel like you were being forced to change in anyway?

JHINGRAN: No, nothing, I mean...you know the educated Indians in India live very well there and we came here and we all used to speaking English. I had no problem as far as speaking English is concerned, although the accent was different, otherwise no problems at all in adjusting to the new society. I'm a member of society and I blended in very well with them. I have a lot of American friends.

PENA: You learned to speak English in India, correct?

JHINGRAN: I was taught English in India. I mean all the medical teaching or the university teaching was always in English.

PENA: Is higher education in India done in English?

JHINGRAN: At that time it was in English completely.

PENA: Did you have any preconceived ideas about what Texas was going to be like?

JHINGRAN: I was very scared because people had scared me that in the South there's a lot of discrimination between black and white. So when I first came here I was very scared the first day. But once I went to M. D. Anderson and had the orientation, I had no problems. There used to be separate bathrooms and separate elevators for black and white. But they said that's not there anymore. I did not notice it.

There was feelings of black and white, but as far as toward Indians, I was never discriminated for that, never ever. My children went to public school and they had nothing bad to say about the schools. They were all public schools at that time; there were very few private schools in Houston at that time. The public education was very good.

My daughter studied up to high school here then she went to Smith College and then to medical school. Now she's a full professor at M. D. Anderson. My son also did high school in the public high school all in Houston. Westbury was his high school and now Westbury is a very poor school but at that time Westbury was a very good school. He went to Northwestern and he did well.

PENA: You were starting to tell me another story and I interrupted you. What else is it that you wanted to tell me?

JHINGRAN: Another story, okay? All right that's the story. It's not a good story. It is a sad story to tell you, frankly. It's about my son. He did well, he did finish his college degree from Northwestern, Engineering and then he did post graduate at Berkeley, California. He came back and twenty-three years later he started his first job in Houston as a Civil Engineer with a company and two years later, about twenty-two years now, 1999, after five years we moved to Sugar Land. He had a bad auto accident and he's completely disabled.

PENA: Oh, I'm sorry.

JHINGRAN: He's still with us. We didn't send him to a nursing home or anywhere else. We are taking care of him personally with caretakers and everything. There is no help there, government help or anything, no Medicaid no Medicare for long-term patients. That's what I'm doing these days, making money only part time so that I have some money to take care of him. I think I will do that all my life. He's a healthy boy, he's now forty-five.

PENA: That's very tragic isn't it?

But otherwise I mean Houston has been very good to me I tell you. U. S. A. has been very good to me. I came here with the intention of staying here for three years, finish my training and go back. But by that time my children started liking it. They got assimilated; my wife liked it and I did not have to struggle for a job. Jobs were always offered to me from M. D. Anderson to Baylor Methodist and gradually I was promoted so I never thought of going back.

PENA: So it has always... met your expectations?

JHINGRAN: Always. More than that. Actually I appreciate the people here. They are the friendliest in the world, China and Africa. Even England. People are the best here, the country is very good.

PENA: Okay, thank you very much. I have enjoyed talking with you.

JHINGRAN: You are welcome.

Interview ends