[0:00]

Vicki Almstrum: Good morning.

Amardeep Kahlon: Good morning.

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

A: Yes.

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

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

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

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

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

V: So which city was it?

A: This was in the city of Chandigarh.

V: In Punjab?

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

V: How is that city spelled?

A: It’s C-h-a-n-d-i-g-a-r-h.

V: Thank you.

A: Yeah. And it was a very … if I can digress a bit and talk about the city. It was a revolution of its kind in India because it was designed by Le Corbusier, who designed cities all across the world. A very well planned city. Most cities in India — I don’t know if you’ve travelled to India — but most cities in India are not well planned. It’s very difficult to navigate cities. This city is like a checkerboard. All north-south roads are parallel to each other, all east-west
roads are parallel to each other, so you can never really get lost. If you miss your turn, you just go to the next turn, take a left, take another left, and you’re back.

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

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

V: Interesting. So you didn’t move around as a child?

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

V: Interesting.

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

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

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

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

V: These were the parents of your …?

A: My mother.

V: Of your mother.

A: My mother. Right.

V: Right.

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

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

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

A: Yes. I just didn’t like it. Didn’t like it at all.

V: So it was more traditional Indian, perhaps?

A: Very traditional Indian. And the school I was in was very western.

V: Yes.

A: So … I just didn’t like it. But … it was fine.

V: And so you continued there through grade twelve?

A: Tenth grade. Tenth grade.

V: Grade ten.

A: It was … at that time in India education didn’t go ’til grade twelve.

V: OK.

A: It only went ’til tenth. And after that you went into something called Prep, a class called Prep in college, which served the purpose of eleventh and twelfth grade. And then you went on into a bachelor’s degree.

V: So was Prep held at a university?

A: At a college.

V: OK.

A: So I went to a college that was very close to my house. It was a college just for women. And so I went to that college and that’s where I got involved in the debate club. And it was just amazing, that experience. I was the secretary of the club. I went to so many different tournaments, so … and won so many awards. My favorite topics were when I spoke about women’s emancipation in India. And I spoke a lot about that. We went to what are called Declamation contests. I went to debates. I went to contests that are called “Just A Minute.” Do you know what Just A Minutes are?

V: Please tell us.

A: They are called JAMs. Basically you are given a topic right on the spot. And you have to speak. You can’t say “Uhm”. You can’t say “Ahh”. And you can’t repeat anything. But you have to speak for a minute. And it seems easy enough on the surface. It’s not. It was really
difficult. Because at some point you’d end up saying “Ahh” and that’s it. You were disqualified immediately. So those are some of the things.

[15:21]
And Parminder nurtured that in me. Because she told me, she says, “You’re an amazingly strong public speaker. You need to do this.” And I will always be grateful to her for that. And my parents nurtured that in me as well. Although they didn’t like me going out of town for tournaments. They didn’t like that at all. But they did nurture that in me. And my grandfather also. And he would always say — he used to call me “Baby” — and he would say, “It’s not possible for Baby to go to a tournament and come back without a trophy.” So …

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

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

V: Yes.

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

V: That’s what I was going to ask!

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

V: Yeah. They understood the truthful living.

A: Right. Right. They said, “We know what you are.” So …

V: Yes.

A: So they were very encouraging.

V: And your brother is how much younger?

A: He is five years younger.

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

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

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

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

[19:59]

V: So for outside activities we have debate.

A: Mmm hmm.

V: We have doing the plays with your friend.

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

V: Reading together.

A: … reading together.

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

A: No, those pretty much kept me very busy. I don’t recall doing anything else, no.
V: So sports and such are not a part of the …

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

V: Yes. It’s all in perspective.

A: Mmm hmm.

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

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

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

V: Does he have a family?

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

V: What is his name?

A: Manpreet. That’s M-a-n-p-r-e-e-t {Grewal}.
V: Very nice. That’s quite a tribute, Amardeep.

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

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

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

V: Yes.

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

V: Interesting. So …

A: With my own self.

V: … you’re measuring against your expectations, do you think?

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

[25:06]

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

A: Yes, I deal with it …

V: … in instances?

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

V: Shall we pause and explain what this new job is …
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
A: Yes. So that is the new job.

V: That’s fabulous.

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

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

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

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

So I did. I did a Master’s in computer science. The first two courses I took were disastrous. I got an incomplete in one and I failed one. The reason was not because I wasn’t good enough at it, but because the US education system was so different from the Indian one that I just dropped the ball completely. So now what to do? Should I continue in computer science or
should I move somewhere else? I said, “Nope, I’m just going to continue.” So I got a degree in computer science. While studying there I worked at IBM for some time. Then I took two years off when my son was born in 1988. In 1990 I went back to Broome Community College and became a professor of computer science there.

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

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

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

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

[35:05]

V: Interesting.

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

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

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

V: Yes?

A: Mmm hmm.

V: Any classes, once you got past these first two difficult ones, that were particularly meaningful or interesting for you?
A: You know what … yeah. There was a programming class. We were about … how many students were in that class? It was a huge lecture hall and it was full. And I still remember the professor walked in and she looks at us and she says, “Look to your left; look to your right. Only 25% of you will be left in the class at the end of the class.” And I said, “OK. So I’m one of the 75%.” But I learned a lot in that class and I made an A in the class. And that was very meaningful for me, because hearing that sentence at the beginning of the class — that “only 25% of you will be left” — and then going on to make an A in the class sort of reinforced to me that I was on the right path. And I was … it was very interesting. I wrote the classic … game of classic concentration in that. I wrote a simple text editor. It was very rewarding to see what I had created working immediately.

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

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

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

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

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

V: Back at Broome?

A: Here. At Austin Community College.

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

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

V: What is her name?

A: Linda Smarzik — S-m-a-r-z-i-k. And then there was … almost everybody at the department has been … almost … no, maybe not. Let me scratch that. Several people at the department
have been great mentors. You know, there … some male professors. We have very few
females in the department. When I started in the department I think we were three females in
a whole male-dominated department. Even now we’re … we are maybe seven females and
all the rest are males. Our department chair is a female.

V: What size is the department?

[39:56]
A: We have total of about 35 full-time faculty and the rest are part-time.

V: OK.

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

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

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

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

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

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

A: Yes.

V: Do you do that a great deal?

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

V: That’s always helpful.

A: Yeah.

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

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

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

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

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

A: Absolutely.

V: Are there some of those you’d like to tell more about?

A: Well, Richard Reddick. I’ll tell you about him. His last name is R-e-d-i-c-k. He was my committee chair, my dissertation committee chair. I still remember the first time I met him. He is from Harvard. He’s got a Ph.D. from Harvard and he’s got his Master’s from Harvard. And I remember driving to meet him and thinking that this was going to be a person who’s … you know, who is going to be in some cloud because he’s from Harvard. He was the most down to earth person I had ever met. He was the friendliest person I had ever met. And apparently — later on he told me that he had heard so many things about me in the department, all the things I was doing, that he was in awe of meeting me. We hit it off right away.
And he has been the most amazing mentor ever. He has encouraged me when I needed encouraging. He has dared me to explore new things. When I said, “No, I can’t do it,” he said, “Ah, you got this.” He would always make it sound so easy. Even when I had doubts about the whole process, he would make it sound good. And he was one of those people who I felt that I could call at any time, that I could … I could seek his guidance at any time. And he always referred to me as being very dedicated, very smart. And he always gave me his opinion, not just for the sake of giving an opinion, or not just because he was … but because he truly had my interest at heart.

One of the things … let’s talk about the dissertation topic itself. I was … I worked with the Computing Educators Oral History Project and I was committed to doing my dissertation on women in computing. That was something that I wanted to do. I was still trying to figure out what angle I would do, you know, instead of just doing the paucity of women in computing — everybody knew that. So what was the angle I was going to take on this? But one day we went to lunch. And that day I had had a particularly bad week in the Indian community where, you know, you go to the dinners and the only conversation is kids’ grades, kids’ class ranks, what extra-curriculars. And it was just … I was just thinking, wondering, “What if a child was failing in this community? How would those parents even sit through these conversations? And who would they turn to for support if that happened?” And I started … I went on this diatribe with him, it was at the Clay Pit Restaurant. And he just sat there and he looked at me for about thirty minutes as I went on and on passionately about this. He said, “You know, you just described a dissertation to me.” And that’s when my topic changed. And that’s the topic I finally ended up doing.

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

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

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

I interviewed — after deciding the topic, after deciding, it was not only a qualitative study, it was a phenomenological study, which means all I was looking at was perspectives. And then deriving meaning from those perspectives. So he was a qualitative researcher and he guided me along the way. But the process was that I had eight participants and I interviewed them
two times each. Analyzed the data using ATLAS.ti. And then multiple iterations of the proposal, the dissertation. And finally July 18th {2012} we went to a final defense.

V: So almost a year ago.

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

V: So you finished in July, turned it in, and then walked in May of …

A: May.

V: … 2013.

A: Because university does walks only once a year.

V: Yes.

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

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

A: Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm.

[54:51]

V: Very good. Exciting.

A: Yes!

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

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

I also got involved with the Association for Women in Technology in Austin. And I also got very deeply involved in the Consortium for Computing Sciences in Colleges. In fact I was the panels and tutorials chair. I was … I actually was the conference chair for the 2004 conference.
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 Project 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 12:01 am, 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

V: And you’re responsible for developing the full course?

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

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

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

V: Yes.

A: … using Jing and Camtasia Studio and …
V: OK. All right. So we’ve talked about your advisor as an important mentor and friend. Are there others in your life who have evolved to be mentors, who have helped you on your path as a professional?

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

V: And his name is … ?

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

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

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

V: There are a number of unknowns in what you’re venturing into. Absolutely.

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

V: It is. And it’s a five-year commitment that you’re making?

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

V: Yes.

A: And I’m moving alone. Family is not moving.

V: So there are a lot of logistics involved …

A: Lot of logistics.

V: … in how you’re going to be living, how you’re going to remain connected with your family. But of course you’ll be closer to your parents and brother.
A: Yes. And also how I’m going to be living alone in a city that is known as the most insecure … the third most insecure city for women in the world. Hmm!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Although I’m a little sad to say that every time I went to the CCSC conference or a meeting, I came back totally excited about something new and it would be killed in my department. Because they would say, “Oh no, we are not ready for that yet.” For example, Python
programming, I came back five years ago and came back so excited that we were going to
offer a Python course. The first time we offered a Python course in my department was last
year. So it took awhile to get them to look at things. That was disappointing, I thought. I
thought … in hindsight, I thought I could have done a different … a more aggressive job in
bringing new things and not giving up so easily, but I did tend to give up easily. When I saw
that there was a pushback, I did tend to give up.

V: And does that relate to the type of position you had more or to the types of relationships
and the others …

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

V: OK.

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

[69:57]

V: Right. Continue on the current path.

A: Right.

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

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

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

V: So it sounds like, as a professional, you’ve been maturing and finding your voice.

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

V: And that brings us back to your first loves, academically, which were debate and the
English literature.
A: Right.

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

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

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

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

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

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

A: Yes.

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

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

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

I think there are going to be a lot of challenges, a lot of challenges. But I also think that despite my constant fear that I’m going to fall flat on my face, I think they will be learning experiences. And they will help me grow as a professional, not in computer science maybe,
but as an overall professional. And I feel I will come out much wiser. I will come out ready to face even better challenges after a year or two years.

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

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

V: Sounds like an excellent plan.

A: I hope.

V: And I know from our earlier conversations that you’re expecting to have visitors as well …

A: Yes.

V: … over time. So that will keep you connected.

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

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

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

{several seconds of audio removed due to phone call and message}
OK. So, I’m not under any false illusions that this is going to be smooth. It’s not. It’s going to be rocky to begin with. It’s going to be a huge learning experience to begin with. They’re going to have to get used to me. I’m going to have to get used to them. But I think it can only enrich me.

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

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

V: Part of it perhaps is that little Imposter Syndrome sitting back there …

A: Yes! Yes! And that’s what …

V: … getting in the way.

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

[80:01]

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

A: I would tell them to keep their passion and I would give them the same advice Dr. Sharp gave me, is don’t be too hard on yourself. Allow yourself to explore. And if you fail along the way, it’s okay. It’s part of the process. It’s part of the process, you know? Because only I failed. I failed in my first course. But that didn’t stop me. And keep the passion. Explore.

Computer science is a vast field. It’s not just one narrow, focused, narrowly focused road.

Find within computer science where your passion is. Do you want to go into pure development? Do you want to go into computer science education? Where do you want to be? And what is your ultimate goal? Find that. What do you want to do with this?

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

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

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

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

V: OK. Thank you.

A: Thank you.

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

A: Not really. I think we’ve pretty much talked about everything.

V: All right. Anything else that you would like to add at the close?

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

V: Excellent. I’m so excited for the adventure ahead. I’m so grateful that we could find the 
time for us to sit down …

A: I’m so honored that you chose to interview me.
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 an 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]