UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

Interview with: Ghulam Bombaywala
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UQ: Oral history interview of Ghulam Bombaywala at his office in Houston, Texas, July 19, 2007. Interview conducted by Uzma Quraishi for the Center for Public History at the University of Houston. You can begin just by telling who you are and briefly what you do now in Houston.

GB: My name is Ghulam Mohammed Bombaywala. I have been around since 1973, so 34 years. July 25 is going to be 34 years. I started out going to school - University of Houston downtown campus. It used to be South Texas Junior College. Before I give you the whole life story, you asked me what do I do?

UQ: Yes.

GB: I spend 75 percent of my time doing community service. President of Pakistani American Association of Greater Houston which represents 60,000+ Pakistanis here. It is sort of a full-time job but it is, of course, volunteer work. But also, chairman of, there is another group called House of Charity where we take medical missions, we bring kids

from different parts of the world. Myself, I travel every 2 to 3 months and go with medical missions. So, that has been my primary . . . what do I do for a living? Of course, everybody knows me with the restaurants, as a restaurateur, but honestly, I spend more time taking care of something that I have a lot of passion for and that is serving the humanity.

UQ: Tell me a little bit about your background. Through your very origins, reach back into your memory - where you are from, your family background, your parents.

GB: From Pakistan. I was born and raised in Karachi, Pakistan. My parents migrated from India and that is where the last name came from - Bombaywala, surname. I was 17 when I made a decision that I wanted to go to America and that is when I came. As far as going to school but, at the same time, working. I started out washing dishes and from there, it's history how blessed that I am that the last 30+ years, it has done a lot of good, creates thousands of jobs. Going back to 1990, we had 66 restaurants and we had somewhere around 3,400 employees. And, you know, like I said, created thousands of jobs through that channel. And even now, or at least, I will say, the last 10 years, I kind of made a decision that I needed to do something that I really enjoyed doing and like I said, you know, serving. That is when I kind of slowed down on the business side of it, even though we still . . . my both sons run the business but myself, that kind of allows me to do different things - travel and really enjoy my life.

UQ: O.K. A couple of questions about your background again. Where did you go to primary school?

GB: Karachi. I went to school there. Unique English School. Then, from there, you know, in Karachi, of course, called CMS. Then, the college was National College. I did my Inter [as in, intermediate school diploma] from there and then came here. Then got my associate degree from the University of Houston.

UQ: When you were still in Pakistan and you had hoped to come here, let's talk about the reasons why. What possessed you to leave your roots, your homeland and search for another destiny in another country?

GB: Mainly, you know, myself, I came from a middle-class family. And, you know, when you talk about a middle-class family, you know, there is no such thing called middle-class family. It is either you are rich or you are poor. So, you can call it poor. But the other reason - a lot of my friends, they were coming to America so we all decided together that that is where we should go and finish our education.

UQ: What did you initially plan to pursue? What course of education?

GB: I wanted to be an industrial engineer.

UQ: O.K., did you start out doing that?

GB: Somehow, I ended up a doctor, a food doctor, I guess. Sometimes, destiny doesn't take you where you want to be but still, I am better off today than where I was before.

UQ: Did you apply to multiple universities when you were in Karachi?

GB: No, you know, my cousin was here so he wanted me to come here to Houston. So that is why I came to Houston.

UQ: O.K., and you had already applied to U of H [Downtown] and gotten admission?

GB: Yes. It used to be South Texas Junior College.

UQ: Did you have some kind of financial aid?

GB: Not from here but, you know, when I came, I came with only $30 in my pocket. That is all I had. And, of course, a cashier's check for the school. That is the way I started and it has been . . . like I said, I did get a job washing dishes. Initially, I went to Michelangelo's looking for a job because I used to live just down the street from there. First, they did not have any openings. Second, they wouldn't hire me because I couldn't speak good English. But that was a blessing that they didn't hire me. Later on after I think 12 or 13 years, I went back and bought that restaurant and we still have that

restaurant. So, that is a very good story. That story got me on the Oprah Winfrey show and a lot of others. So, like I said, Houston has been good to me. I have been really blessed. I am having the best time of my life.

UQ: How did your parents feel about sending you to America?

GB: Of course, you know, like any other parents, initially, they said "no" but later on, they realized it was the best thing for me and they agreed.

UQ: Do you have siblings?

GB: Yes. I have one brother, two sisters and, you know, matter of fact, here I have a brother and sister.

UQ: And where are you in the brothers and sisters? Eldest, youngest, middle?

GB: Second in command. My sister, she is in London.

UQ: Once you came here, you lived with that cousin that you spoke of?

GB: Yes.

UQ: And you came here, you started. You said you came in July.

GB: 1973.

UQ: So, you started school that fall?

GB: Yes.

UQ: And got the first job where?

GB: Working for Victoria Station. That used to be a steak house so that is where I got the job.

UQ: And what did you do at that job?

GB: Washing dishes, salad boy, then, a bus boy, and on and on. And finally became a kitchen manager. So, that was a good 2-1/2 years, 3 year period.

UQ: And that was part-time though?

GB: Full-time.

UQ: At what point did you stop going to school full-time?

GB: In 1976. In 1976, I decided that it was at that time, you know, the idea was somehow I needed to get a green card and that is when I went into business. My first convenience store, that was in 1976, when I got my convenience store with my partner. That is when I could not handle 3 things: school, work and the store. That is when I gave up school.

UQ: O.K., but you continued to work as the manager?

GB: Yes, for another 2 more years so I was there for almost 6 years.

UQ: If you don't mind me asking, was your father also an entrepreneur, a businessman?

GB: No, he used to work for the city. But my grandfather was, yes.

UQ: What did he do?

GB: In the printing business.

UQ: Any other uncles or relatives who are in business?

GB: Yes, quite a bit. A business family. Quite a bit of people were in business.

UQ: So, it was kind of natural for you to consider this as something of an option anyway?

GB: Yes.

UQ: So, you went into business. Where did you get the funding for the convenience store?

GB: Well, we bought the store for $14,000. So, me and my partner . . . mine was $7,000. I got the loan for half and half I saved up over the period, so that is the way we started.

UQ: O.K., and then from there?

GB: From there is, it's history . . .

UQ: You don't have to go into every detail. I guess what was the general trend after the one convenience store?

GB: Well, 1976 was the first convenience store. Then, 1979 was the second convenience store. Then, the third, fourth. Then, all of a sudden, we had 10 convenience stores.

UQ: Same partner?

GB: Same partner, yes.

UQ: What was his name?

GB: His name was Mohammad Monis. So, then I decided we wanted to open up a restaurant. That is when I started . . . some of my friends used to work for a Mexican restaurant and a lot of people asked me, "Why a Mexican restaurant?" I always tell them a Mexican restaurant, when you fry the beans, you call it fried beans and then you burn the rice, you call it fried rice, you know, so it is kind of natural. You couldn't go wrong. We started our first restaurant in March, 1984, with 8 employees.

UQ: What was it called?

GB: It was called Marcos Mexican Restaurant. Like I said, we had altogether 8 employees. That is the way we started it. And also, it was such a success that within 6 months, we opened up a second restaurant. Then, I sold all the convenience stores and we started focusing on the restaurant side of it. At one time, within I'd say 10 years, within a 6 year period, I had almost 20 restaurants.

UQ: Where was the first Marcos?

GB: Kuykendall and Louetta. 1960 area.

UQ: And you still had a partner at that time?

GB: No, I had a bunch of partners at that time but then, as soon as I opened my second restaurant, then everybody kind of cashed out and I started focusing on the restaurants. And like 1990, we ended up buying James Coney Island with some of my partners. They are still with me.

UQ: Now, that was already a franchise?

GB: It is not a franchise. It is self-owned [by me and my partners]. Everybody thinks it is a franchise, but it's not a franchise.

UQ: It is not, O.K. But it is not something that you started up?

GB: No, it has been around for 83 years.

UQ: That is what I thought.

GB: 84 years now.

UQ: How many locations are there in Houston?

GB: We are 22.

UQ: Are all your restaurants in Houston or are they beyond?

GB: No, all in Houston. Yes. So, that was in 1990. Then, in 1990, I took over a public company. There was another restaurant called Two Pesos. Two Pesos was sort of upscale type of Taco Bell. That is what it was. An upscale Taco Bell. And when I took over that company, that one had like almost 30 restaurants, 28 or 30 restaurants. And then, it was a public company so it is a whole different ball game when you are running a public company. So, at one time, I was running at least 3 different chains and doing really well, making a lot of money, doing a lot of good for a lot of good people. So, it was good. Life was good. And then, Two Pesos, we sold Two Pesos to . . . as a matter of fact, in Two Pesos when I took over the company, like I said, it was a public company. I became the chairman and the president of the company, owned the majority of the company. There was a big lawsuit against us from a restaurant company called Taco Cabana for look-alike, that we copied them. And it (Taco c was before my time so I can say, yes, we did copy them. Just a different color. We went all the way to Supreme Court.

UQ: The State Supreme Court or U.S.?

GB: U.S. Supreme Court. All the way there and the best part was, yes, we lost the case but we won the battle. We lost the case because it was just one of those deals. You know, you can't tell what is going to be the outcome. And the whole thing was . . . you know, it used to be I would use to give a lot of speeches. I mean, I used to go out on a weekly basis and do different schools, different chambers, different breakfast clubs, so it was kind of a fun thing to talk about, about this case. People used to say, "What is this case all about?" Yes, I can tell you in legal terms, too, and I can tell you in the layman [terms] And layman was like if there are 4 gas stations in one intersection - one is Shell, one is Exxon, one is Mobil and one is something else. Because you are looking at the signs. But if you took the signs down, they are no longer Exxon or Shell. They are gas stations. The same thing goes for fast food. You know, they are fast food. They are no longer the Jack in the Box or whatever the name you want to give. So, the Fifth Circuit came down with the ruling saying that look alike, because it was a look alike but different color . . . that you cannot have the look alike. But the Tenth Circuit in New York said yes, you can have the look alike. It is not against the law. When two circuits give you different opinions, that is when we were . . . the judgment was almost like $3.6 million we paid because we lost the case in the lower court. We went to Fifth Circuit. We lost the case there. Then, I made a decision, no, we need to go to Supreme Court and the deal when we paid those guys the money, we made a decision that . . . it was my decision that we should go to Supreme Court because you already spent enough money, you already

spent almost $2.5 million attorney's fees. So, might as well spend another $500,000 and let's try the one hand. The other hand was the publicity. We were getting so much publicity that the business was good.

UQ: So bad publicity is better than no publicity?

GB: Oh, yes. It was good for our business. After paying them, when I told them this is what I wanted, that we should write down that if this thing is overturned, we are going to get our money back from you. And they all started laughing, saying Supreme Court doesn't have time to listen to a taco and enchilada fight, you know. I said, "Just write it down." They did. And lucky they accepted our case. We went to Supreme Court and, you know, that was a great experience going there because it was more of a learning experience for me. I mean, I was still in my 30s, you know, late 30s, so it was a good experience. But then, like I said, you know, we lost the battle, we won the war. Yes, we lost the case there but at the same time, you know, I worked out a deal with them where they bought us out. So, all the Taco Cabanas that you see in Houston, the majority of them used to be Two Pesos. We had 20 of them in Houston. So, they converted all our restaurants and they paid us very good money.

UQ: No regrets?

GB: No regrets, period. No. We did good for our shareholders and ourselves, so that was really good. As soon as I sold that in 1994, I wanted to kind of slow down my life and that is when we sold Marcos to another company called Billy Blues and then we had problems with that. But in business, you know, you are going to win some, you are going to lose some. Then, we had another concept . . . we started a new concept called the Original Pasta Company and that was good for a while. Then, later on, we kind of phased out with the carbo stuff. Then, we had a lot of other restaurants I used to have. We had a restaurant called Billy Blues. That was ours. Nash D'Amico's. Guggenheim's Deli, used to be a Jewish deli that I ran for 11 years. I mean, right on Post Oak we had that. And we had Short Stop Hamburgers. We had like 52 franchisees. So, it was kind of . . . really had fun with all this stuff.

And then, like I said, after 1995, I kind of purposely slowed down and decided that, you know, I don't need to prove it to anybody, my ego - my mom already knows. So, I kind of slowed down purposely. And doing a lot of, you know, of course, a lot of further investments - real estate and this and that. But, like I said, we still had quite a bit of restaurants and we are blessed. The difference is now, at least I don't spend that much time like I used to. Like, for 13 years, I was the president for James Coney Island. Now, I am just the director and the co-owner which is good for me, you know, less headaches. That is what I wanted. So, looking at the big picture, if I had to go back and people asked me, the last 25, 30 years, what would you do different, I wouldn't do anything different. I had so much fun, so much . . . creating jobs. You know, that is the best part. And so, I wouldn't do anything different. And now, what I am doing, I am just having the best time

of my life. I work with our House of Charity and a lot of different organizations that I am involved with. It is just fun.

UQ: O.K. If you could think back again to when you first arrived in Houston or even before that, what did you expect of Houston before you came here? What did you expect to find? What was your knowledge of America and Houston beforehand?

GB: Well, I'll tell you, when I came to New York first, I told one of my cousins that that is where I wanted to go, to Houston. This was in 1973. He said, "You don't want to go there. There are still horses and cows on the road," you know? Being in New York, that is what his thought process was. But my cousins were here so they thought this was a very good city.

UQ: They had positive things to say?

GB: Very, very positive. Very positive. Good people and all that. So, when I came here, we had not even 100 Pakistanis here. Yes, not even 100 Pakistanis. But I will tell you that the day I arrived here, the next day, one of my cousins kind of said, "Let's go and look for a job," because I had only $30. So, here I am in the Westheimer and Montrose area looking for a job. Then, there was a gas station there, Shamrock it used to be. So, we went there. And then, a friend of my cousin was working there. He said, "I can teach you how to pump gas," because back then, there was no self-service. It was attendants

used to do all the work. And his idea was . . . and then you can go and look for a job once you learn everything. So, here, that was the first . . . in less than 24 hours in Houston, I was there pumping gas, learning and all that and I got robbed. Me, my cousin and also his friend. That was the first experience. Only in America, you know? Here goes. But, you know, I had no complaint about it because I didn't want to go back to Pakistan. Yes, a few days, of course, I felt it . . . you know, 17 years old . . . I felt daily I needed to go back but then I was just moving on with my life.

UQ: Was this a robbery by gunpoint?

GB: By gunpoint, yes.

UQ: And you must not have had much to give, I would imagine.

GB: My watch and some money, $10, $20. That is all.

UQ: Other than that negative experience, what was your feeling of how Houstonians treated you since you had interaction with them from the first day?

GB: No, Houston has been really good to me, I'll tell you. Houston has been really good to me. I am involved in so many different groups that, you know, I know so many people in Houston. A lot of good people. So, Houston is good.

UQ: Even back then?

GB: Even back then, too. Yes. Even back then, too.

UQ: Do you feel it has changed in any way, the way Houstonians or, I should say, Anglo-Americans, the way they view you? Do you feel like it has changed?

GB: No.

UQ: How did you handle the language issue when you said you didn't speak English very well but you started working?

GB: Washing dishes, you don't need to know any English. But slowly, slowly, I learned. And the good thing with really Americans, they always appreciate if you are trying. If you are trying, they always appreciate.

UQ: You didn't take any classes or anything?

GB: Of course, went to school but that is it.

UQ: For English?

GB: Yes. Just regular school. Nothing special classes, no.

UQ: O.K., it is kind of like throwing someone into a pool and saying, "swim." You've got to learn.

GB: That's it. You don't have a choice.

UQ: O.K. When you were at U of H [Downtown] or, as you called it, the South Texas Junior College, were you part of any Pakistani student organization on campus? Did they have a PSA when you first arrived?

GB: We didn't have PSA back then, no.

UQ: Were there any kind of groups just formed even informally?

GB: Just a lot of friends. Yes, a lot of friends. We'd meet each other.

UQ: Did they hold any kind of events, functions, or no?

GB: Not really.

UQ: Just getting together?

GB: Just once in a while getting together, the same group. Yes, the same group.

UQ: What was the interaction like between you and your Pakistani friends and the Indian students on campus?

GB: It was good, very good. Because we used to see the [Indian] movie [together].

UQ: How frequent?

GB: Once a month or every other month, they would have movies and we all used to get together at U of H. So, yes.

UQ: When you arrived in Houston, you were a single guy, a bachelor. When did that change?

GB: 1978. That is when I got married after 5 years.

UQ: O.K., and did you go home to get married or did you marry here?

GB: No, I married here.

UQ: Is she also Pakistani?

GB: No. She is half Spanish, half Irish. I have 3 beautiful kids from her. The marriage lasted 6 years. And then, after 3 years of that, in 1987, then I remarried for the last, now, 20 years.

UQ: Was your family present at that wedding, the first one?

GB: The first one, no.

UQ: Just friends?

GB: Just plenty of friends.

UQ: How did they feel? If this is getting too personal, just let me know.

GB: No, ask me any question. There is no such thing as personal.

UQ: How did they feel about you marrying someone outside of the Pakistani ethnicity?

GB: They accepted it. It was all right.

UQ: Can you highlight any specific . . . you almost already have, but any specific struggles that you faced or any hardships after your arrival here?

GB: Well, initially, just getting a job. Once I got a job, then I was fine. Going to school. Working. Even started a business. Of course, every day is a struggle in life. It all depends on how you accept that struggle. A lot of people . . . I think just a way of life, you know, every day is a challenging day. I take it more positive than negative.

UQ: How difficult was it to obtain your visa when you were in Pakistan?

GB: Well, at that time, it was easy. At that time, it was pretty easy.

UQ: And fairly quick?

GB: It was fairly quick, yes. They were giving away [visas]. . . they needed more young . . . youth. I always tell people that yes, we did good to our Mother Land but at the same time, don't forget, we are going our youth here so it is a two-way street.

UQ: Why do you think they were so open to accepting people from Asia?

GB: From different parts, not just Asia. Also, from everywhere. Well, just ongoing . . . the way I look at it, America is really all immigrants. Nobody is native, only the Indians, you know. They are the only ones. As a matter of fact, a few months back, I was at one of the hearings, immigration hearings and in my turn, I said, "You know, the only difference between us and the locals here is your ancestors came before ours, that is all." Otherwise, we all are immigrants. So, you can't put restrictions on immigrants. There are so many other ways you can do so many good things rather than trying to put restrictions.

UQ: After you arrived here, were you able to maintain contact with your family?

GB: Yes.

UQ: How did you do that? What means of communication?

GB: Back then, of course, writing letters which I never liked, so, or on the phone. And then, after 10 years or so, they all came.

UQ: Who followed you after . . . you said, "they all came." What does that mean?

GB: My brother, my sister, then my mom and dad.

UQ: Was anyone left in Pakistan?

GB: No. Lots of cousins but . . .

UQ: Immediate family is all here?

GB: Yes, more than 20+ years, 25 years.

UQ: Would you still recommend friends and family to come to America?

GB: It all depends. If the youngster is coming to go to school, yes. This is the best place. But if the family is coming to settle down and they are just a middle class family, no, I would not.

UQ: Why?

GB: Because they will be better off there. The struggle they would have to go through. You know, if you are young, if you are washing dishes or working in a restaurant, it is all right. If you're sleeping in some corner, it is all right, but if you have kids with you and you are migrating here, it is not easy. It is not easy, believe me. I tell people, "Don't make this mistake." You know, if you are already 35, 40, 45 years old and then if you have to start all over again, unless you are a professional, unless your family

had plenty of money, then it is no problem. But I would not recommend it. That is one thing, second thing, you know, if you don't have your papers, don't come. America is no longer the same like it used to be where you can get away being illegal. No more. Especially the newcomers. No more.

UQ: After you came here, did you maintain any kind of interest in Pakistani politics?

GB: No, I was never, because, see, the way I always believed, that the age of 18 and 25, between that age, you do two things in life: the first one, you find love and get married or if you don't get married, at least you fall in love. The second thing, you know, being a Pakistani, since we are so much into the politics, you are aligned with some political party. But I just never had that option [because I came here before age 18] so, you know, for me, all these parties are . . . when I see myself, I just tell people, "The only party I belong to is Pakistan," which is not really like I am pro this or pro that. No.

UQ: O.K., when you first came here, did you intend to settle here, did you intend to complete your education and return back to Pakistan?

GB: Complete my education, save $150,000 and go back. That was the goal.

UQ: When did that change? At some point, you obviously decided to stay.

GB: With time, yes. You know, like I said, you can make all the plans in the world, you know, but at least you have to be flexible to really . . . the priorities change in life. When I was 20, my priorities were different. 30s, my priorities were different. Now, my priorities are different. It used to be you couldn't make me sit down for 30 minutes like this, see. I was just hyper, just doing things. And now, I enjoy what I do.

UQ: When you came here, did you have deeper relationships with the non-Pakistanis? Did you have friendships and things like that where you met socially, you went out with non-Pakistanis?

GB: With a lot of my Indian friends, yes. A lot of my good friends.

UQ: Maybe the non-*desis*?

GB: I have plenty of friends.

UQ: And you felt that they treated you well?

GB: I never had a problem. It is really up to you. You know, we like to isolate ourselves. It is us. It is not the outsiders, no. It is us who think and who feel guilty. That is why I tell people that, you know, even though I am bringing some different issue, we need to stop being sorry about 9-11 - what those 19 people did, O.K.? That inhumane

act. For how long are we going to be feeling guilty and saying sorry? We should not do that. We don't have the responsibility of being sorry but we have the responsibility of talking about Islam. This is our responsibility. What Islam teaches. This is what you need to go out and talk about. That is our responsibility. And we are still lacking. That is the way I believe. You are your own critics, you are your own competition, and, you know . . . that is why I tell people, "Stop worrying about others. Just focus on what you are doing and just make sure you are doing the right thing, the right thing for people."

UQ: I imagine that when you first came here and you had that group of friends, Pakistani/Indian friends on campus, that they identified themselves as Pakistani [or Indian].

GB: Oh, yes.

UQ: Now, since you have such interaction with the Pakistani community at large, do you feel that they identify themselves more as Pakistani, more as American or equally both?

GB: Well, Pakistani American - we are first generation. Any first generation, you go through this span of trying to decide - you know, am I American or am I Pakistani first, you know? It is a two-fold question. And, of course, we call ourselves Pakistani Americans but also at the same time, yes, that is our motherland and we should not forget

the problems and sufferings there - that whatever we can do to help, help. So, that should be both sides. But looking at living here and then for the sake of our children, we should look at what is best for us here because our children don't know anything better. They don't have a clue about Pakistani. Do you think they care about Pakistan? No, they don't. They would rather be called Muslim Americans than Pakistani Americans.

UQ: So, you don't feel the second generation will continue that same concern?

GB: No, they won't. They will go more towards their religion than the country.

UQ: Are you speaking from something you already observed? Is that what you think is already going on?

GB: Yes, dealing with 60,000 Pakistanis. You know, we are very opinionated people. You know, you put two Pakistanis in one room, you get three opinions out of them. So, just on a daily basis, I deal with them. And myself, for being the mainstream person . . . you know, all my life, I have been the mainstream guy, running the public companies, sitting on different mainstream boards, never was involved with the *desi* community. But the last 10 years, I got sort of, kind of involved. A lot of my friends used to accuse me of being too much on the other side than here but then, I always did good for people so it is not that we didn't do anything good. But after 9-11, I kind of felt that it was really my

duty to really give some direction to our community, because I could foresee the problems that the community is going to have.

UQ: Like what?

GB: Oh, just immigration problems. We have so many people with immigration problems. We have so many people . . . the way I look at it, all these people, our people are . . . there is a big difference between Pakistanis and Indians. When the Indian person comes here, the first thing they do is they take care of their status. When the Pakistani comes here, the first thing that they do and they think - making money. It is like a . . . you are not really thinking long-term, you are thinking short-term.

So, if I wanted to be a president of the Pakistan Association, I could have been a president 20, 25 years back. I never had any intentions of having a presidency because I could do a better job without having a position. After 9-11, I kind of felt that it was my duty to really get everybody together and some of the things that we have done through the organization, I think nowhere in America that those things had been done. Pakistan Association used to be the . . . it was a social organization. It is still a social organization but back then, it was only 2 things: let's do one *mela* [bazaar] and one picnic. Now, I mean, we have 40, 50 programs we do a year or more. Sometimes we do more. We have done so many, like over 1,000+ people have gotten their citizenship through us. We did so much outreach programs for so many different things, especially Immigration. Homeland Security. We have done so much sensitive training for the Homeland, for FBI,

for all these people through our organization. And back then, nobody needed that stuff. Now, we do. We work so close with the authorities. We work so close with different groups. That is why I said you cannot be just trying to create your own image. No, you have to work with other organizations. So, what we have done in the last 5 years is phenomenal. I mean, I know looking at it, that we have really helped thousands of our people out through Immigration, through all that. You know, without Immigration. If you don't have a green card or if you are not a legal person, the fear, that is going to come back and haunt you. I mean, I know so many people, they have been in our homes and two more cities and they don't have the papers. And when you ask these people why, they don't have the answer. There are a lot of people like that. And that is why I tell people, "Fix your status. That is more important than money. Money, all your life you are going to make," because the time is coming when things are going to get tougher and you are going to have to straighten up your act. So, sooner or later, the time is here.

UQ: So, you think 9-11 was really a turning point as far as mobilizing the Pakistani community, kind of increased the consciousness of what needs to be done?

GB: Yes.

UQ: So, not just for you but I think even for others?

GB: For others. For anybody. For everybody. We need to do more than what we have been doing. We need to get involved with the more mainstream. I mean, myself, I have been there 25 years, I have been involved mainstream sitting on different boards, being on the volunteer work. I mean, so much stuff that one can do and I tell people, "At least just get involved and show your face there. This is more important than just trying to isolate yourself, having your own . . . go out and work maybe two hours a month for the United Way, the Food Bank. There are 1,000+ charities here. Why not? I used to sit on the United Way board, the Food Bank, the Blood Bank, University of St. Thomas, University of Houston. I used to sit at the Hilton School. I used to sit on all those different boards and learn so much from people and have connections with people where our people are still lacking.

UQ: Would you say the membership for PAGH has increased?

GB: Overall, the awareness has . . . yes, because membership, every Pakistani is a member automatically but every Pakistani cannot vote unless you become a member.

UQ: A voting member?

GB: Voting member.

UQ: How many of those do you have?

GB: We have over 3,000 now but when the time comes for election for the president, it is going to go up to 10,000.

UQ: What about the volunteer members - people who are giving their time to help PAGH and all of its projects? Has that increased?

GB: Oh, yes. Plenty of them. Believe me, we have tons of people.

UQ: Are they recent immigrants or are they immigrants who have been here for 10, 20 years?

GB: A lot of the newcomers, yes, they want to help the community. But, you know, like now, we have the Golden Club at the PAGH where all senior citizens, they meet at least once a month, first Sunday of the month. They go out o picnics. We provide them with lunches, the buses, every first Sunday of the month. They look forward to that. Then, we have Youth Club. Then, we have Ladies Club. So, these are just regular things that we are doing just trying to create more awareness. We just finished building up Pakistani Community Center and that is a landmark. Nowhere in America that huge . . . nowhere in America is there a Pakistani center.

UQ: O.K. I am going to be frank with you. What do you see the future of PAGH because you just said that you don't think that the next generation is going to be as

concerned about Pakistan. If that is the case, what is going to happen to PAGH, which is a Pakistani organization?

GB: It is going to grow because there are so many . . . [end of tape 1]

UQ: You were talking about the future of PAGH.

GB: I personally think, you know, PAGH is an institution and it has been around for 35 years now so it is going to grow with some of the services that we provide, you know, from getting groceries to the people who are in need, trying to create more jobs, trying to help people for jobs, the medical side of it. Now, we are even building a clinic there at the Center. That center is 37,000 square feet. It is a huge center. And yes, for the last 30 years, it was a dream of the community and thank God, at least now we have it. And the way we have really done it is more of a real creative financing where we are no longer a burden on society. Not just the Pakistanis but also the mainstream. We are not asking for money from even the mainstream, where revenue from the shops will take care of all of our payments, and it is now 100 percent leased. So, you know, I think it is a landmark now for us, at least for the community that we have something that we can feel, we can touch it. It is no longer a promise anymore. It is there.

UQ: Most of the people that you help through PAGH are first generation Pakistanis?

GB: Yes.

UQ: As long as there is fresh immigration, you will always have people who need that kind of assistance.

GB: That is true.

UQ: O.K. Hypothetical situation. Immigration slowly declines and Houston's Pakistani community is largely second, third generation community. What then comes?

GB: It won't decline. People are going to continue coming because, you know, we live in an immigrant society who are going to continue coming and the beauty of Houston . . . we are getting so many people moving from different parts of America here because, of course, the cost of living, of course, the weather and all that. And I'll tell you, all over America, you can go to all the big cities - we are the only community, the only Pakistani community, who still gets together where there is no difference whether you are a doctor or whether you are a taxi driver; where if you go to LA, there is a group of doctors. They have their own organization. There is a group of business people. They have their own. The professionals, they have their own organizations. Same thing in New York. In New York, there are 87 organizations. With us, PAGH is the only organization and yes, little [groups/organizations] we have but those have no value. Anybody can go online and for $11 and you can have an organization but is it really real? No, it is not. So, PAGH has

been around for 35 years. And it is going to continue to grow because as we mature, as the community matures, as the people get more affluent, the social problems are going to grow, and they are growing.

UQ: Problems like what?

GB: Social problems, domestic problems, kids, the parents. That is going to continue and it is going to grow more and more. So, we are going to need more help than ever before: what do we need to do with our seniors, how do we need to entertain them, why can't we have a little colony where all our seniors can live and meet with each other and be happy about it, you know?

UQ: You were talking about PAGH. Is there anything else you wanted to add?

GB: Yes, through the organization, I mean, now, since we have our own community center, we can do so many things there. And then, we already started getting . . . like, last Saturday was a wedding. 800 people. This Saturday is a *naat khani* [concert of religious hymns] 1,000 people are coming, you know? A lot of things we are just renting out. We cannot handle all it all ourselves but a lot of other organizations are using this place which is good. And the best part, like I said, you know, everything is rented out. All the shops, with revenue from there it's going to take care of the payments, plus we've got a clinic ready to open where it is going to be a very minimal charge, $25 charge clinic, and

on Sunday, it is going to be free. So, you know, something that would help the common man. That is my goal and I think through the Association, some of the things that we are doing, it is good.

UQ: O.K. A couple more questions. One was when you first arrived in America, how frequently did you visit Pakistan?

GB: Every 2 to 3 years. Now, I go every 2 to 3 months.

UQ: But the reasoning is different? Back then, you had family still in Pakistan whereas now, it is for humanitarian reasons?

GB: Now, it is all medical missions. We go and pick up the kids, we drop the kids. As a matter of fact, she [Hashmat Effendi, president of House of Charity] left today. With doctors. I am going to meet her on the 12th. I am taking the kids back. And then after one week, I am going to bring the kids back from there. New kids.

UQ: Tell a little bit about just the vision of House of Charity.

GB: House of Charity has been around for 11 years and Hashmat Effendi is the one who really started it. Initially, we used to bring kids from different parts of the world but now, yes, we are bringing kids from different parts of the world. We have our own

healing home where we can keep up to 18 kids. We have a full-time nurse there and kids from different parts of the world, from Pakistan, from India, even from China. Then, we get kids from Mexico, El Salvador and the rest from that area, too. But also, we do now more missions. We go out and take medical missions. In January, our group was in India. In February, I took the group, me and her, we went to Pakistan. In March, our group went to Vietnam. In April, we went to Pakistan in a really remote area called Jacobad. We screened 150 kids. We did 63 surgeries. So, it is kind of . . . and we gave them 40 food containers of medical supplies. May was Morocco. And now, she is gone. As a matter of fact, she is going to go to Pakistan and then Nairobi from there. So, it is a lot of good to common man.

UQ: How many volunteers does that organization have?

GB: God, we've got hundreds. We've got plenty of doctors, a lot of nurses. They all want to go with us. But then, you know, we always try to kind of mix and match because you don't want to have too many doctors and not enough nurses, you know, and all that. So, in that sense, we have been really kind of blessed that we get a lot of support. And, you know, the good part is we get a lot of support from the mainstream. And that is where we really focus. We don't have too many Pakistani doctors. It is unfortunate.

UQ: Do you think there is an awareness among the Pakistani doctor community of this effort?

GB: There is plenty of awareness there. You know, we all are human beings and we like to hear what we want to hear. We like to do what we like to do. That is the way we are. But we have been really blessed that we have so much from mainstream. I suppose, you know, our people are too busy making money. We are still going through that phase now. We are still going through the phase of whose house is bigger than others. So, you know . . . but again, everybody has their own way of doing it and we get more . . . we get so much support from the mainstream, so much . . . we used to do, for House of Charity, we used to do our gala where we used to raise money for the whole year and now, we quit doing that. We do it every 3 years. But we get a lot of support from the mainstream now.

UQ: So, you really don't even need to do the gala for financial reasons?

GB: No, we don't. It's too much . . . it is too much headache, too much headache, so that is why we don't even do it. We have our own donors that we go to and we work out a deal, saying once a year, we will come to you and you just give us X amount of money. That is how it is coming from the mainstream so that is better for us anyway. We can do more good.

UQ: O.K. Aside from visiting Pakistan, how else did you maintain a connection to Pakistan? I guess two answers: one in the period when you were primarily a business

man and then now, I think you already answered it in the way that you maintain that tie. Back then when you were visiting, how did you maintain ties to Pakistan?

GB: I just visited the families.

UQ: Did you invest?

GB: No.

UQ: Not at all?

GB: No. Somehow, I never got trapped into that. Just going visiting and helping people out.

UQ: So, your connection to there was basically just that?

GB: Yes, just visiting, vacationing, helping people. That is all. But even now, you know, besides these two organizations, you know, we have other organizations like Al Shifa Eye Hospital that I work with. I sit on their board. Then, there is another organization, SIUT with Dr. Adeeb Rizvi, you know. And then, Karachi. So, with them, I work. As a matter of fact, we have a rehabilitation center there under my mom's name where they teach ladies how to sew, they teach men how to make drapes, computer,

flowers, bouquets, and all this stuff. So, there are a lot of other things that we are doing there that are helping the common man.

UQ: Did you send back money to help out your family when you came here and started the company?

GB: Oh, yes. From the first day. Oh, yes.

UQ: And your cousins? This is something that was fairly common, you would say, among the students who were here - sending back money to support . . .

GB: Everybody. 9 out of 10 people were doing it, yes. 9 out of 10.

UQ: Can you remember, would you mind saying, just about how much? I know that a little went a long way over there.

GB: Well, you know, going back to the 1970s, a couple of hundred dollars a month. That was a lot.

UQ: O.K. I think we are down to the last question and this is, in your eyes, how has Houston changed from that first decade you were here to now, as you said, 34 years later?

GB: Well, you know, earlier I said, as a community matures, your social problems arise and we have to be ready for all those, how to deal with those problems. And that is why PAGH is playing a real major role in helping people to do these things, especially the immigration side of it, you know. Back then, we didn't have that many problems, you know, life was simple. But now, you know, from the community's standpoint, you know, it is a big community, 60,000+. So, I just think we need to plan ahead. I will tell you one of the things that me and my family have done. It is an Islamic cemetery. And somehow, I got involved in 1994. Now, Zeenat Foundation . . . Zeenat was my mom's name. So, Zeenat Foundation has almost 15 acres where we have 11,000 spaces for Muslims. And then, we would have a space there for 3 acres for the future funeral home there.

UQ: Where is this located?

GB: It is right on Telephone Road and Almeda Genoa. All the proceeds, all the profits, every single penny goes to Islamic Center of Greater Houston. You know, it is a blessing that we could do these things. The only condition that I had put is: 1) for Muslims. There is no definition for Muslim. I don't want to put something saying this is for Shiite, this is for Sunni, this is for Hanafi or Shafi'i [religious sects] or Pakistani or Indian. No. This is for all Muslims. 2) If anybody cannot afford it, it is free of charge. No questions asked. As long as Islamic Center follows these two things, Zeenat Foundation will give them every single penny that comes to them. By the way, last year,

after all the expenses, Islamic Center got over $100,000 out of it. So, that is the only department in Islamic Center . . . the "Mayad Committee" department is the one that makes money and they use those funds for other purposes which is fine. We have no problem with it. As long as they do not discriminate among people, we are fine. So, you know, you have to be a visionary. You cannot just think of today. You have to think for tomorrow. Let's plan things for the future. So now, with the Islamic cemetery, the next 50 years, the community does not have to worry about it. The next 50 years is without any problem. So, you know, that is the way you should really build. You should build institutions. Your system needs to be strong. You don't need to be strong. I am here today. Tomorrow, I will be gone. But as long as we have a system, then we don't have to worry about it. So, the way I look at it - we are so blessed, you know. Yes, we have some politics in our community but, you know, that is first generation. You pick any first generation. They brought all the politics and everything from back home. So, once the second generation comes, all that stuff is phased out, you know. I guess that is the way I look at it. I think it is just a normal thing that we are going through and we will be fine. At the end of the day, our next generation is going to come out stronger and better. I do believe that.

UQ: O.K. Where is that Healing Home, by the way?

GB: Healing Home is at the corner of Sugar Hill but real close from here. It is Wilcrest and Briar Forest. Her office is here in the next building. We have her office there in the next building.

UQ: I didn't know that.

GB: Yes, 105. That is the number. But, like I said, she left for a 3:45 flight. So, she will be back on the 23rd. Next month.

UQ: O.K.

GB: You can interview her.

UQ: I plan to. Thank you very much.