

Interviewers: Katherine Aberle, William Braswell, and Simone Delorme

Interviewee: "Bobby" Tekwani

Transcription: Suzanne Davidson

Interviewer 1: And where were you born?

Bobby: I was born in India. I was born in Rajasxan, it's a state, Rajasxan, and I was born in a town called Bunidi.

Interviewer 1: How do you spell that?

Bobby: B U N I D I. And the state is Rajasxan, R A J A S X A N, Rajasxan.

Interviewer 1: And how old are you, if you don't mind us asking.

Bobby: Thirty years old.

Interviewer 1: So, how long have you actually been in the U.S.?

Bobby: I've been here since 2001.

Interviewer 1: 2001.

Bobby: I moved here two months before 9/11.

Interviewer 1: Oh. Wow. Oh, wow.

Bobby: Yeah, I came here in July of 2001.

Interviewer 1: Wow. Some interesting moments.

Bobby: It was.

Interviewer 2: So, what brought you to Mississippi?

Bobby: My dad is a professor of pharmacology on campus. His name is Dr. Tekwani.

Interviewer 2: Where else in the U.S. have you lived, and for how long?

Bobby: Actually, I first came to America in '89. I lived here until '93. We used to live in Hershey, Pennsylvania. My dad used to be a doctor over there, he was a research doctor for malaria. So, we were there until '93 and my mom kind of didn't like it. We were way too young. I have two older brothers. They were all here with us. So, like, my mom wanted to go back, and my dad stayed in Pennsylvania and me, my mom, and my brothers, we all went back to India.

Interviewer 1: Oh, wow. Okay, okay.

Interviewer 2: I guess, going off that, my next question would be: Where else have you lived around the world?

Bobby: I have lived in Dubai, for about a year. I lived in Australia with my dad for about two years when I was younger. My dad traveled a lot, so we actually moved around a lot as well. But most places, the longest periods of time were in Australia and I lived in Dubai. And most of my life, I lived in India and here.

Interviewer 1: Well traveled.

Bobby: Yeah. Well, my dad's probably been to like forty-plus countries, to give lectures and stuff so...

Interviewer 1: That's exciting.

Interviewer 2: Do you have family members in the area?

Bobby: Over here, I have my mom and my dad. That's the only family that I have over here.

Interviewer 2: So, like where in the U.S., or other parts of the world, do your family members live, if not here?

Bobby: Um, we have like far families, like in Chicago and stuff. Like, you know, my dad's sister and like relatives and stuff. But most of my family is like all in India.

Interviewer 2: Generally, what line of work are they in? What do they do?

Bobby: My brothers are in the textile business. So, one brother is actually a builder, he does, you know like contracting, building, and everything else. And everyone is in like the telephone market. They do like towers and stuff. Everybody, we have a joint family business in India, so everyone is one business, but they have like different parts of the business. Like, one brother does the contracting, one brother does the manufacturing of the cloth, one is a retailer, you know, one does like the wholesale distribution. So, all the parts of our businesses are like run by the family members. Because my dad has four older brothers and three younger brothers. So, we have a very big family. I'm like the nineteenth grandson, so like we have a very big family.

Interviewer 1: Oh wow. That's fun growing up.

Bobby: But everybody's in India. There's only three of us here.

Interviewer 3: Is it a challenge to maintain the relationships with your family?

Bobby: My mom and dad go back every year. Like my mom is there at least three or four months out of the year. I try to go every couple of years, because it's hard... Before I owned Locals, I worked for corporate America. So, you can't just...It takes two days to get there. So, by the time you fly from Memphis to Amsterdam, Amsterdam to Mumbai, it's like twenty-seven hours, twenty-eight hours. So, you get jet-lagged. So, you don't really go that often? But, I mean I still talk on the phone. International calling is a lot easier and cheaper than it used to be back in the day. Like, I remember in 2001, 2002, our

phone bills would be like three, four hundred dollars a month, just international calling. But, now you can get Vonage and pay the sixty dollars a month and talk as much as you want to. And we have it on our cell phones and we can call the Vonage extension and everything. So, it's a lot easier to keep in touch with them than it used to be.

Interviewer 1: Yay, modern technology. That's great.

Interviewer 3: And, can you tell us a little more about your education? Where did you go to elementary school, high school, and college?

Bobby: Well, we went to school here, in Hershey, Pennsylvania. Then I went back, I did my middle school at a boarding school, an English boarding school in India, as well. Then, after that I did my high school in India, most of it. Then I did eleventh and twelfth grade of high school in Oxford, Mississippi. Then, I started my undergrad here in 2002. I did my undergrad in business management. Then, I did my MBA here as well, too. Then I graduated and I've been out of college since 2007 now. After 2007, I started working for Aramark on campus, so I was a student manager, I was in one of the first student-manager programs that Aramark brought in to their company, so that was back in 2007. So, while I was doing my graduate school, I was working for them. Like, all the towers that you see...the Einstein Brothers on campus? That was one of my projects that I brought on. Subway? That was one of our projects. Starbucks? That was one of our projects.

Interviewer 3: So, that wasn't there before 2007.

Bobby: No, Einstein Brothers was bought after 2008. It was opened in 2009. We did a marketing survey, with Aramark that said students want more national brands. That's how I got into the food business.

Bobby: So like, I just got an internship with them. I never did anything else before. That was one of my first jobs, and I just stuck with them. I worked for Aramark for about five, six years, and I moved up all the way to regional district manager with them. And I got moved to the University of Knoxville. So, I got promoted all the way up and I became operations manager over there and I became operations director. Slowly, I kept moving up the company with them. Then, after that I got an offer with a different company and I started working...my minor was in finance. So I worked for a company called DT Acceptance Corporation. DT Acceptance Corporation used to underwrite loans for people who have bad credit and everything else, help them with that as well. I did that for two years and then...We were writing loans at like twenty-six, twenty-seven percent interest rates, so we were, I mean they paid us a lot of money, but it was not something that I really morally liked, you know, it was different underwriting cultures that I didn't like at all. While I was working for them, one of my friends tried working for a company called TG Capital. TG Capital owns Burger King. So, I became a business leader for Burger King. I used to run two hundred and eighty Burger Kings. So, almost three hundred Burger Kings. I was a business leader for the southern region.

Interviewer 1: Wow.

Bobby: So, I had a contract with them, I worked for them for about two and a half, three years. So, I've been out of college for what, eight years now? nine years? So, most of my part I spent with Aramark. I worked for them, then mostly I worked for Burger King for a while. Then I left the company in 2013. I took a [*inaudible*] lay-off, I mean my contract was still there, so they paid out my contract. You know, so what TG Capital does, they go and buy... It's a Brazilian investment firm. It's actually out of Brazil. They go and buy companies. They bought Burger King as way low priced, you know, they downsized the company, they send guys like us around to go lay off people.

Interviewer 1: Oh no, so that was your job.

Bobby: You know, cut every overhead that we had. Like, we had a team of people that just traveled around and then whatever we can cut and improve the business to make sure, you know, back then Burger King wasn't private so, well it used to be public, then they brought it back, then they put it to public again after the company was functioning better. So now if you guys see, compared to 2010, and if you look at 2016, if you guys do some research there, there's more market presence of Burger King on TV than there used to be.

Bobby: You know, back then, you heard about the creepy king. They used to always make fun of that. We took that away. Then we brought it back. Burger King was just trying to find out what they wanted to do and where they wanted to be, you know? So, they did a lot of stuff. It's a great company to work for because, you know, they buy and sell companies. They buy a company, they make it better. They bought the company at like fourteen dollars a share and they sold it at twenty-six. So, that's what they do. That's what they actually make money out of. That's how I got into this business. I worked for them for a long time. I went to school here. I grew up in, kind of, Oxford, you know. I always wanted something on the square. So, before I was going to take over this location, I was going to buy Rib Cage.

Interviewer 3: Could you tell us about your experiences living in India? Positive and negative memories you may have?

Bobby: Well, positive is my family's there, you know? It's like I never needed any friends. I mean, like we're all like two years, three years apart. I mean, I had friends as well, too, but you know, my dad's older brother, he has five sons. Like, I'm three [*one of three boys, mentioned above*] One of my dad's other brothers has three sons. So, there's so many boys, we never needed that many friends. We went to the same school. You know, literally everybody knew us because there's so many Tekwanis in the school. [*chuckles*] So it was like, a little bit, we were just having fun over there. And one of the negative things about India, it is just very corrupted. So, if you want to do anything in India, it's just a little bit corrupted. That's just, corruption's everywhere, you know, so that's just probably one of the most negative parts about India.

Interviewer 1: So if you wanted to have a business, for instance, would you have to pay certain people?

Bobby: You have to bribe people. You have to bribe to go to college.

Interviewer 1: To go to college?

Bobby: Yes. You have to bribe people to get into college. You have to bribe to get a driver's license. I just came back from India...what, March the second. So, we were driving to the Rajasxan border and we were in the bus. And just for the bus to go through, the driver had to bribe the cop otherwise, the bus couldn't go through. There was no reason for him to ask for money, but he did anyway and people in India, they're busy, so they don't want to have to deal with the cop, so they'll just let the corruption go on without even trying to fight the corruption.

Interviewer 2: Can I just ask?

Interviewer 1: Absolutely, if you have questions go ahead.

Interviewer 2: Like, how deep does it go?

Bobby: Hold on one second...[*interview is temporarily stopped*]

Interviewer 1: We were just curious about learning a little more about India.

Bobby: People always ask about the caste systems and everything like that.

Interviewer 1: Yes, that's what we wanted to talk to you about. We were curious about that.

Bobby: I am a Hindu Sindhi. We were actually migrated from *present-day Pakistan* when the partition happened in 1947. Like most of the Sindhis and everything else that lived [there], and after, when the Hindus were told to move to the India side, we all migrated, our grandfathers all migrated to Rajasthan. That's why, if you look at the Pakistan border, and you look at the Rajasthan border, we were right there. We were right on the border side.

Interviewer 1: I wasn't aware of that. Interesting. Are there certain rituals, traditions, holidays.

Bobby: Everybody knows that Hindu has a lot of gods, right? There's a god of protection, you have Ganesh, you have Lakshmi and everything else. Even me being here at a younger age, I don't know everything a hundred percent? My parents are very religious as well. I just, whatever my mom tells me to do, you know, just to keep her happy we do whatever needs to be done to make her happy. You know, the closest temple from here is in Memphis, Tennessee. Everybody talks about, you know, the monkey god? The Hanuman ji? They talk about the elephant and Ganesh? You guys all ever hear of Ganesh? The guy that has the elephant? That's a pretty common thing in like pop culture that everybody has. Like a Ganesh statue in front of their house and everything else. So that's, you know, so that's the thing, there are so many different cultures in India. We are considered the business caste of India.

Interviewer 1: The business caste, okay. And your family's all in business.

Bobby: Yeah. That's the same thing, like Patels and everything else, they're different over there. Like, depending on what your last name is, everybody knows where you are. Like, I'm Tekwani. Tekwanis are Sindhi. You can tell by somebody's last name what caste they are.

Interviewer 2: Didn't know that.

Interviewer 1: I know we were talking about the name Patel. Do you know what caste that is?

Bobby: Even Patels, there are different types of Patels. Depending on what religion they are from. What part of India the... hails from, depends on what type of Patel they are. We are different type of Sindhis, depending on what part of India you are from. Like, most of my family is from Rajasthan. For all our businesses, because we started, we moved over there in '91. So, compared to that and everything else, it just changes accordingly.

Bobby: Even, I know a lot about it, but I'm not a hundred percent detailed about it because I've been here since I was fifteen years old. So, I know what my culture is, but going in to any detail, if you have any questions, I can definitely find out though.

Interviewer 1: Okay. Are there tensions in India between different groups?

Bobby: Not really. There are always the Muslims and the Hindus, they always fight. You always know about that. There's always, India and Pakistan are always arguing. When I was little, there were always riots and stuff, with Hindus and Muslims all the time. The town would go under curfew all the time when I was younger, as well. Those things are normal in India. It just happens and it's never going to stop.

Interviewer 2: I just had a question about the corruption. Is it countrywide, does it go all the way up to the top? Or just some local officials?

Bobby: It starts at the way bottom and goes all the way to the top. You know, like over here, there's corruption here, too, but it's at a very high level. There's not corruption at a lower level, but in India, it happens so from the peon all the way up to the minister.

Interviewer 1: Are there any particular elements of Indian culture that are particularly memorable to you?

Bobby: I miss the festivals, you know. You guys have heard of Holy right? Just recently, March 28, is the color of festivals. It's the festival of colors. So, you guys know the color run that just started, the 5K color run and all that? That was started from the festival Holy in India. I think it was March 26th, or 25th. So, people play that, they go out and put color on each other, and they play with water, and water guns. Those are the memories that I have. Sindhis have a different new years. They have a different date that we start our new years as well, too.

Interviewer 1: When is it?

Bobby: I think it's in April something, but if you send me the questions, I can get you all the detailed answers. Then you have Diwali. Diwali is a festival of Lakshmi. You know, it's the lights. You'll see people use firecrackers. It's kind of like the 4th of July. It's kind of like Christmas for India. Yeah, similar to Christmas in India.

Interviewer 1: Are these celebrations that you've been able to bring here?

Bobby: My mom still makes a Punjab. A Punjab is like a prayer. We have like six bedrooms in the house. My mom has made one into a temple.

Interviewer 1: And that's here in Oxford?

Bobby: That's here in Oxford, yeah. So like one is like a temple room where she prays.

Interviewer 2: Why didn't you tell me any of this? You never told me any of this.

Bobby: You didn't ask me. You never asked about my religion.

Interviewer 1: So, now you get to learn a whole lot more about Indian culture.

Bobby: If you come to my house, I don't have it. But my parents' house has it, you know? You should have asked me [*laughing*].

Interviewer 1: And what does it look like? I've never...

Bobby: Well, one thing about India is, we pray to a guru. We are Sindhis, so the god that we pray to is still alive. It's kind of like a priest kind of giving a sermon. You live by the values that you set. And there are so many different cultures in India, too. You have Punjabi, then you have Sindhi people . . . There are twenty-six different languages in India. You know, I speak four languages. I speak Sindhi . . . I speak Hindi, and I speak English. English I learned over here, Sindhi is my culture's, Hindi is the mother tongue of India. Even sometimes, I'm from the north part of India, and in talking to someone from the south part of India, I have to speak English to them. You know, with us being ruled by England for so many years... You know, we were ruled by England for almost three hundred and some years. We are a very new country. We just got our independence 15th of August, 1947. So, it's still a new country comparatively.

Interviewer 1: So a lot of people learn English just to...

Bobby: At a very young age. You'll comparatively see that everything is taught in English books. You know, if you go to China, their books are still in Mandarin. You know, they have English books, but they try to keep their language, their reading and writing. I can't read in Hindi. I can speak it. I mean, I can read it, but I sound like a five-year-old trying to read.

Interviewer 2: Like at your parents' house or when you're talking to your mom, or even your dad. I've only seen your dad once. Are you speaking in Hindi?

Bobby: I speak in Hindi to my dad, yeah. Sometimes Hindi, depending on what it is, and mostly it's like half Hindi, half English, all the languages mixed together.

Interviewer 1: Do you code-switch, you know, where you start one, then...

Bobby: Yeah, there are things that I can say in English that I can't say in Hindi. I'm like, you try to form a sentence in English that you try to say in Hindi, you'll sound backwards. So, the languages and everything else changes, so they're just all mixed together.

Interviewer 2: I remember we were on the golf course the other day and you took a phone call and you just went straight in to Hindi, was it?

Bobby: Yeah, Hindi.

Bobby: It all just depends. It all just mixes.

Interviewer 1: We asked a little bit about the caste system. Does it really impact your life every day?

Bobby: It doesn't. Because technically, the business caste is considered the highest caste of India. You know, it all depends. In India, you have family, you come from money, it makes a very big difference. It's kind of like over here, if you're a millionaire in American, you still shop at Walmart. If you're minimum wage people, you still shop at Walmart. But, in India, if you have a lot of money, you shop at different places than the person who doesn't have money. So, it's just completely different in that way. It changes the way they shop, the way they eat. What family you come from depends...Like, in India, there's not really a big credit score. You're known as by what your family's name is. You know, the loans you get, your family background, and everything else helps out in a different way. Now, the middle class is coming because all the foreign [inaudible] is going to India. There's a middle class coming to India for all the call centers and people getting jobs and everything else. Jobs are getting outsourced. You can find an IT guy build a website in India on ten cents on a dollar. And it will be just as better, you know. The point is, you have 1.2 billion people there. There are PhD's driving taxis in India because they can't find jobs. It's different to say, but how many Americans do PhD's here? The graduate school rate is less than 10% students, after graduating undergrad, actually go back to graduate school. So, the rate is very low, not just Ole Miss, but any graduates. You talk to the business school here at Ole Miss, like, my professors, I'm still friends with like Dr. Bing and everything else. Like my old college professors, they want more graduate school presence. But, people don't want to go back. People don't want to. And that's what the point is. Some people don't know that doing an MBA gives you a \$50,000 a year pay jump.

Interviewer 3: Is there any system of student debt in India like there is here?

Bobby: If you don't have money, you don't go to school. There's no student loans. It just doesn't work that way. You have to figure out a way to pay for your school. The public school system isn't that big over there, even for the younger age, you have to pay to go to school. So, like every school is private there. You have some public schools? But, I don't know really where they are because the population is so big. I always went to a private school. So, what family you come from does affect what upbringing you have.

Interviewer 1: And your occupation, your future...

Bobby: Like compared to my family, my dad's family was always in business. My dad was the only one who decided to step outside of the family and actually go out and get his PhD in biochemistry. You know, he did that, then he started doing research on Malaria. He used to be the head of the Central Druggist Institute of India. So you know, my dad did that for a while. So, my dad's been here for a very

long, off and on...People always ask me that. They say, "Why Oxford, Mississippi?" and I say, "Well, I didn't make that choice." And technically, it was free for me to go to school here. I had a scholarship, and you get half tuition, you know by way of being a professor's son. I had no student debt when I graduated college. Even if I went to a better academic school, which I'm not saying Ole Miss is not a good academic school, but there are better ones. But why would I do it? My dad always said, "The same books are taught at Harvard that are taught over here." Only thing a different university might give you, is give you a better chance at a job somewhere. It's just recommendations and networking and everything.

Interviewer 1: Right, it's the name as opposed to what you actually learn.

Interviewer 2: I'm just kind of curious, and I may be way off base here, because I wrote this question. Are there any similarities to the caste system here? Are there like class stratification or inequalities that you see? Like, around the square, or the way that people interact with one another?

Bobby: It is a little bit different. For example, I'm a single, thirty-year-old guy owning a restaurant and a bar. Lenore's is a family guy's, wife works as a nurse. So, more families go to his restaurant than come to mine. That's a different thing over everything else. I'm not saying me being non-American makes me feel different, but I'm pretty sure there always is, there are some people that might not like it that I own something on the square. I don't really know. Nobody's ever expressed it to me. So, I can't answer that question in that sense.

Interviewer 2: How would you describe the society in Oxford? I mean, is there a hierarchy in the community? And really, do you think that students interact with locals well?

Bobby: I would say that Oxford and Mississippi are two different places.

Interviewer 1: Ah! Interesting. See, we keep hearing this, where Oxford is this island.

Bobby: If you talk about Mississippi, or if you go to Bruce, Mississippi? Or if you go to Abbeville. I would not feel comfortable walking into a restaurant in Abbeville.

Interviewer 2: You want me to cut this off?

Bobby: No, it's fine. It's no big deal

Interviewer 1: Where is that?

Bobby: Abbeville? It's like thirteen miles down the street from here. It's just a different town, the way people are raised over there. There are some people in that town who have never left Mississippi. But that's their choice and everything else. Oxford? I've always felt welcome here. I went to school here. Like, I've never felt like there's any way that race made a difference. I know that sometimes it happens and everything else, but I don't really advertise a lot that I own this place. Don't let it known very much. You'd be very surprised. But people know that a guy named Bobby owns this place. You know, like me and him will be sitting here and someone will ask, "Is Bobby here?" I'm like, "No, he's not here."

Interviewer 1: Oh, so you'll tell them no. So, you don't want people to know.

Bobby: I just say that jokingly. Locals know me. Most people I went to high school with here know me. And they come here. I've always been to bars in this town. I've supported other bars for a long time. That's how I kind of got into this business when I was going to kind of, you know, get into Rib Cage. So, that's how I got into the part of owning Locals. But, everyone knows Oxford is different. I mean, in a lot of ways, saying that a caste system applies here? Not to that extent, no.

Interviewer 1: We found out a little bit about language already, right?

Interviewer 2: Do you want to take it from seven?

Bobby: To eight? Telling people that I'm getting married? *[laughter]*

Interviewer 2: It never came up.

Interviewer 3: You would describe Oxford as pretentious?

Interviewer 1: Oh, yeah, that was the question you were curious about.

Bobby: It is pretentious. You've heard me say that before. In a certain way, everybody is a little bit pretentious sometimes. I'm not saying it's the right way, but there are some things...The kids, you know, are pretentious in ways that they're trying to make an impression. They're learning, they're growing up. You know, it's the same way that I was. I came from India. I didn't know a lot of people. Sometimes, you try to be pretentious just to fit in. You know, that happens in every culture. You know, like I didn't join a fraternity. Like, I wanted to, but I never thought I would get accepted in one.

Interviewer 2: Come on, now.

Interviewer 1: See, you thought he was in a frat.

Bobby: I was. I joined later on. But before, I thought that I would never get in. That was my freshman year. Comparatively, and everything else, it just changed . . . But at first, I never thought I would get in. That's the pretentious thing that you don't know until you start seeing it happen. You know, now, everybody gets rushes and everything else. If you want to rush, you have a chance to rush. But, Ole Miss was a lot different in 2003 than it is in 2016.

Interviewer 1: Oh yeah. We have lots of questions about that. We're curious.

Bobby: Comparatively, Jackson Avenue was two lanes. Oxford was a very small town. Oxford has grown a lot in front of me. Walmart used to be where the Malco is. You know, it's just changed a lot.

Interviewer 2: You want me to just take it from eight, then.

Interviewer 3: So, do you eat Indian food frequently?

Bobby: Every day.

Interviewer 3: Do you have access to the necessary ingredients?

Bobby: My mom goes to Memphis all the time...There are Indian stores in Memphis as well.

Interviewer 3: Do you ever go to the Indian restaurant?

Bobby: Maharaja?

Interviewer 3: Yeah.

Bobby: I'm not going to comment on that.

Interviewer 1: That was the next question. Is it authentic?

Bobby: It is authentic, but I mean, it's more south Indian food.

Interviewer 1: Oh, okay.

Bobby: Like, spices used by south Indians are very different than what northern Indians use, yes. Like, everyone has their different dishes, you know.

Interviewer 1: It's different.

Bobby: Yeah.

Interviewer 1: What are some of the dishes that are well-known?

Bobby: Well, chicken marsala is more like a northern dish. They cook it in all the restaurants . . . My mom is a vegetarian, so that's very different. You know, she cooks it for us, but she doesn't eat it. So, she tries to cook something she's never tasted.

Interviewer 1: That would be interesting.

Bobby: Me and my dad, we've always traveled for work, so we've learned to eat more non-rich food. We're not vegetarians, you know, and she doesn't like it, but she cooks it anyway for us.

Interviewer 1: That's nice of her. That she didn't make you be a vegetarian along with her.

Bobby: Yeah.

Interviewer 3: Did you grow up not eating meat?

Bobby: I've always eaten meat. I'm just not going to be a vegetarian.

Interviewer 1: And you presumably can cook, right?

Bobby: Yeah, I cook.

Interviewer 1: Have you ever served Indian food here, as part of the menu?

Bobby: We've tried . . . We're actually working on...we talked to a chef in Birmingham...we're going to try to make Locals kind of fusion restaurant. We're going to try to bring in Indian food here.

Bobby: The regular chapter we have here now, that's something that we've been working on. But we haven't had the good luck to find a chef that can come here, cook all the time, and launch it on the square. But, technically there is no authentic any other food except American food on the square. If you look at every restaurant, you've got seafood, pasta, and everything else. That's about it.

Interviewer 2: I don't know, but a little birdy told me that you're getting married sometime soon. Can you tell us a little more about your wedding?

Bobby: I'm getting an arranged marriage. I tried dating as well but it didn't work out for me. I felt like I was getting thirty years old and it was time for me to settle down. So, I told my parents...This is, her dad and my dad are family friends. You know, so I knew her when I was in India. But, we didn't really keep in touch when I moved over here. Then we reconnected, you know. I just got engaged February 25th.

Interviewer 1: Well, congratulations. You said recent, okay.

Interviewer 2: What type of ceremony would you like to have? And are there certain rules or customs, like, towards around.

Bobby: It's a little bit different in India. The wedding lasts about like ten days. You have different festivals and different functions. You know, the ladies have their functions, you have some for the guy . . . The guys get together and do something. Those are some questions, like I know what happens, but I don't know everything detailed. You tell me and I can definitely get you more answers. Like, I know the ceremony for the wedding lasts two and a half hours. You sit beside a fire, then you have to like go around the fire seven times saying some prayer that the priest tells you. And everything else, then they say repeat after the priest. Then your mom and dad and Punam, my fiancée's name is Punam. Her mom and dad will be sitting on one side, my mom and dad will be on one side. I'll be sitting on the right and she'll be sitting on the left. And they'll just say some prayers. And we sit together and talk about the prayers and everything else and it's a long wedding. And it's a very big wedding. Like, just now there's ninety-nine immediate members in my family. There's like eighty-some members in her family. So if you count her relatives and my relatives, even if we try to do the smallest wedding possible, it'll be at least 500 people.

Interviewer 1: And this is in India, right?

Bobby: This is in India. And I just got engaged, there were more than 260 people at my engagement.

Bobby: And people would walk up to me and talk to me and tell me who they are, and I'm like, "I have no idea who you are."

Interviewer 1: What is the tradition for engagement? Is there a party?

Bobby: Yeah, it's just a party, a simple party. There's like a ring ceremony, you know, you exchange rings and the family meets each other and they give gifts and everything else. There's like a reception after that, you know, and it depends on what culture you're from. Like Sindhi, we drink. The business class drinks in India. Some of them don't like drinking. They don't even bring...some vegetarian castes in India don't eat egg. Some of them, they would have a heart attack if you brought meat into the house. Like, they would freak out.

Interviewer 1: And you have to know all these things.

Bobby: Yeah, you have to know whose house you're going to and everything else. Most of the time, when we go into a house in India, we take our shoes off. Because most Indians have a temple inside their house. So, you don't wear your shoes inside a temple. It's a sign of disrespect and everything else, so...

Interviewer 2: I cannot see you not drinking.

Interviewer 1: Well, it's a bar that you own, you have to. You can't serve things and not taste it.

Bobby: It just all depends, I mean culture-wise and everything else. My mom doesn't really drink. I've never had a drink in front of my dad. I own a bar.

Interviewer 1: And you just don't do it.

Bobby: I don't do it as a sign of respect for him.

Interviewer 1: Your dad doesn't drink then.

Bobby: Yeah, he drinks. He comes here all the time and drinks all the time.

Interviewer 1: But you just don't drink in front of him.

Bobby: My older brothers do. I just don't. I guess my older brothers are married and they have children, so I guess they started doing it. I've just never felt comfortable to do it in front of my dad. When my friends come to our house, to my parents' house, my dad will offer my friends a beer and I'll just be sitting there, "Well, okay."

Interviewer 1: And he won't offer you one.

Bobby: He won't offer me one.

Interviewer 2: I guess we've kind of covered the rules or norms surrounding marriages, the rituals and things like that.

Interviewer 1: Oh, but related to that, in terms of the arranged marriages, it that within the caste?

Bobby: Yes. It is. She is from the same caste . . . Funny part is that one of her older sisters is married to one of my cousins.

Interviewer 1: But you all grew up presumably in the same area, so you all knew each other.

Bobby: Yes.

Interviewer 2: So, you're saying that you couldn't marry outside the caste.

Bobby: You're not supposed to.

Interviewer 1: Is that put in practice?

Bobby: It's frowned upon. They would not want me to marry a Patel. I might as well marry an American.

Bobby: Even in India, you can be Hindu, but the practice of Hinduism is completely different. The food is different, everything is different. And one of the reasons, the relationships that I've had that never worked out is, even if I tried to introduce them, they felt outside. They will never fit in. And I never wanted to do that to somebody. I realized that a lot later on. I think that since, I mean I am Americanized, but I'm not *that* Americanized, compared to American-born Indians.

Interviewer 2: I'm just curious, what about divorce, the flip-side of marriage? How is that handled?

Bobby: Different cultures, you know, I know a lot of people ask me about dowries. In Sindhi, we don't take dowries. That's very frowned upon in my family. You don't take anything from the girl's family. You know, some cultures, the girl's family has to pay for the wedding. We pay half and half, or depending on the financial status. Just like, my family is stronger than hers, so we'll probably pay more. We're trying to make it more lavish. We're not going to force somebody, say, "Hey, you've got to pay for this wedding and spend more money." But, no. If you want to do it more like my uncles, and my dad are comparatively well-off, they would do it different.

Interviewer 1: I was just going to ask if divorce in India is prevalent.

Bobby: It happens now. It wasn't before but I don't know anybody in my family that's ever been divorced. I don't think it will happen. I mean, I hope it never happens. You know, my parents never saw each other when they got married.

Interviewer 1: They had never seen each other?

Bobby: And they've been married for thirty-eight years. And they never saw each other before they got married.

Interviewer 1: We were talking about that with arranged marriages. Much more stable, the longevity.

Bobby: They say you can fall in love after marriage.

Interviewer 3: Has your fiancée spent her entire life in India?

Bobby: Yes.

Interviewer 3: And is she planning on coming here?

Bobby: Yes, she will be here in July.

Interviewer 3: Is there a preference to marry someone who is also staying in India?

Bobby: Why would I want to get married to somebody and just leave them there?

Interviewer 3: Right, but if you've grown up in India and you spent your whole life there.

Bobby: I mean if I was moving back, then probably. But, I mean, we try to look for Indian girls over here. And I talked to some Indian girls that were here and like, comparatively, I've talked to others and it's kind of like a blind dating thing. It's not like 100% arranged, my dad saying, "You've got to marry this girl." It's not like that anymore. We talked on the phone, you know, we met each other. We talked about our likes and dislikes. And if you feel like you're compatible, then you say yes. It's kind of like Match.com, you know? One of those things.

Bobby: It's like you find out, but it's kind of like parents talking to each other. Everybody knows in your neighborhood and your society, "Oh, Bobby's getting old enough to get married. My daughter's ready, let me go talk to his dad and see if they will get married and they can talk to each other. If they're compatible. Everyone is different, you know. Some Indian girls would not like that I drink. Some Indian girls would not like that I smoke. It's a simple thing. Even my fiancée has stipulations. She's like you have to change a little bit. You know, I didn't hide [*anything*], but it's like that in any relationship. You have to compromise and adjust to it. But, that's what it is, though. I mean, I can't be getting drunk like I did in college, you know.

[laughter]

Bobby: It's just one of those things. You have to change yourself and adjust to everything else as well.

Interviewer 1: Has your fiancée been here before?

Bobby: Not to America, no. But, I've been there to visit. But, she's been to other countries. I mean, she's educated. She has a masters. She has an MBA as well. She's worked in import/export for her dad. Her dad is in like surgical imports. So, like they're in the business side as well. All of her brothers are in the textile business as well. Everybody is into business.

Interviewer 2: So, how long have you known Punam?

Bobby: I've known Punam since probably '98? '97?

Interviewer 2: That's a long time.

Bobby: More like, I met her then. How long have I known her is a different question, you know?

Interviewer 2: But, like, you've known who she was since '97.

Bobby: Since '97, yeah. When her older sister got married to my older cousin.

Interviewer 1: Is she excited to move?

Bobby: She is very excited, yeah.

Interviewer 2: Kind of switching gears from that. I want to know, after you graduated, what brought you back to Oxford?

Bobby: Even when I worked for TG Capital, I was stationed out of Memphis. I was very close. I used to live right in downtown. I used to travel a lot. I traveled for two years, being on the road 250 days. Even in my own apartment I never went home. So, like when I came back, my mom would be like, "Why don't you come back..." My dad is 59 now, 60. So, my dad's probably going to retire. He wants to go back to India. So, we say, "What am I going to do in Oxford?" I was sitting in Rib Cage having a beer and he says, "I'm thinking about selling this place." So, I made my mind that I wanted to open something on the square. And I was going to change the name anyway. I was not going to keep the Rib Cage name.

Bobby: I have always wanted something on the square. I used to love the square so much and I probably spent more time here than in classes.

[laughter]

Bobby: Comparatively, I used to love Oxford. I still love Oxford. And that's one of the reasons I came back. And my parents, they're here. So, I'm never going to lose ties to Oxford, you know, if I go anywhere in the world, Ole Miss is a very big family. I have always felt welcome here. I have a lot of friends here. I have friends from Lebanon that came here to go to school. They still have jobs on campus. So, a lot of my friends that's came in the international program with me, they're still here. So like, we all still hang out all the time. So, it's kind of nice. In that way, we never left.

Interviewer 1: That's rare. Usually when they graduate, everyone goes in different directions.

Bobby: I left after I graduated, but they still stayed here. They were waiting on getting their green cards and everything else. Me, I have my green card, and I waited so long not to be a citizen. I could have been a citizen ten years ago, but I didn't want to be a citizen until I don't have to [inaudible] India. So, I waited a long time to become a citizen.

Interviewer 1: So, intentionally, was that the plan the whole time?

Bobby: Yeah. I just wanted to wait. I mean, my dad did it. I just don't feel like becoming a citizen yet, you know? So, I didn't. So, you know why I selected Locals? So we can support the whole Locals' community. That's what the whole mission statement was, that we were going to try to buy locally as much as possible, you know.

Interviewer 1: That was one of the questions: "Why the name?" What was this called before?

Bobby: It used to be Blue Ray.

Interviewer 1: Blue Ray.

Bobby: Yeah. Blue Ray used to be here. Blue Ray started over here.

Interviewer 3: So, that's why it's Locals?

Bobby: To support local communities and I felt like I'm a local because I've been here

Interviewer 3: When did you open?

Bobby: 2013, December.

Interviewer 3: And I kind of already asked how you decided the location.

Bobby: At that time, we were going to open the Rib Cage, and this opened as well, too. We were trying to look for other locations as well. You know, rent was a little bit higher so we found this place. We liked it, we thought it would work, but at the time I never thought it would be so hard to get people to walk one block.

Interviewer 3: How does the location impact your business and clientele?

Bobby: It was very challenging. I started ridiculous drink specials in this town.

Interviewer 1: And that's what helped?

Bobby: It was like a contest. We would drop the prices and everything else. You know, the only difference in my food background was that I ran national brands. They had a set menu. Running your own business the backup, the staff, makes a big difference. People might think, "Oh the owner doesn't know what he's doing." The owner can open the front of the house, but if the kitchen staff doesn't do what their supposed to do, I'm not cooking the food for you. I can give you the best service possible, then all I'll do is get angry at the kitchen staff. And it was very shocking. We did not do very well the first six months. You know, and I'm lucky that I have the family background that I do. It kept me afloat for a very long time and I have savings as well, too. So then we started seeing improvements. We're in our third year and we're doubling our sales every month. We're getting bigger and bigger. Locals' name is getting bigger. People know about us more. I mean like, we used to spend so much money on marketing and I would still hear from people "Well, I don't know where Locals is." And I'm like, "How do you not know where Locals is?"

Interviewer 1: What type of marketing did you do?

Bobby: We hired a marketing firm. We did that as well to help it out. They didn't really help us out so we fired them. Then we started doing ads in the DM's, we passed out over 50,000 flyers all over town. We spent a lot of money with Local Voice. We do ads with them. DM's, you know, Oxford Eagle, radio ads, we have a continuous ad going on 95.5. The ad runs in it all the time. Some business owners, local, that I have, I do business with them and trade. They come here and eat and drink and they help me out on their businesses. If you know the local people, they're worth it. So, technically it's the same, if he came here and ate and spent a hundred bucks, I could get a hundred dollars' worth of marketing from him. So, like we do trades in that way as well, too.

Interviewer 3: And then, where do you get your food and how do you determine your menu?

Bobby: My chef's name was Roland Schneider. He's from Switzerland. He actually helped me write my menu. Funny part is, Roland used to be my boss when I worked for Aramark.

[laughter]

Bobby: He helped me out a lot. You know, he has his own business as well. He does, like, consulting, for fraternity houses. He does their food for them. He does your food.

Interviewer 2: Yeah, he cooks at our house.

Bobby: So, when I was an intern, Roland was my boss. I moved up into Aramark, I was Roland's boss. Then after that, Roland left for a different company and I left for a different company. Then we reconnected and he's the one who helped me write all my recipes and everything else I have right now.

Interviewer 1: Is he trained in a certain type of cuisine?

Bobby: I don't think Roland really has a specialty. He's been here in the South so long. I mean, he cooks the best shrimp and grits you can imagine and he's a guy that was born in Switzerland. If you ask him, he would say, "I didn't know what shrimp and grits were when I came to America." He had a restaurant in Memphis for a while, he worked at the casinos for a while. Roland is almost fifty-nine or sixty years old too, as well. He's an older chap, yeah.

Interviewer 1: And he's been with you the whole time?

Bobby: He's been with me...He wasn't with me when I first opened, but he was with me five months after I opened. And that was the first five months when I knew I was struggling in the kitchen staff. That's when I called for help, yeah. I called every connection I had from my past. I even hired a consultant. I even called my franchisers from like Burger King bosses. They came down and helped me. It was a lot of different...It was difficult for me and it was a learning experience from doing it from a company that has a type of structure to doing it on my own. At the same time, I was kind of young, too. I was twenty-seven at the time? Twenty-six? When I first opened? So, it's been three and a half years. So, at the same point, learning at that age. It's expensive, so everything I made doing corporate America since I graduated I put in to Locals. And after that, we've done other investments as well, too, outside Locals.

Interviewer 3: That's the next question. Can you tell us about your other businesses?

Bobby: We have some businesses in Mobile. We have two bars in Mobile that we have partnerships in. Operating partners in it. The biggest thing is, you can't be so far away and try to run a bar. That's the best thing about different bar businesses. In Alabama you don't have to have to serve food to open a bar.

Interviewer 1: And here, you do?

Bobby: Yes you do. You have to have thirty percent food sales. That's why we do, why we became so much of a bar. We started seeing that we were doing more alcohol sales than we are doing food. So, we started pushing cheap food specials. We started doing dollar tacos on Monday. And then tonight you're going to see a hundred people come in and get twenty-five cents wings. We don't make a lot of money, we break even on it, but we have to sell food.

Interviewer 1: And the mark-up on alcohol is enough, does that kind of help balance things?

Bobby: It's kind of like a *[loss eater?]*.

Interviewer 2: So basically, you were talking about, you're going to have a hundred people in here. You're going to have twenty-five cents wings, which I'll be one of them. So, I just want to know, who comes in here? In terms of the population. Is it diverse?

Bobby: It all depends. Sometimes we have families. Last night, it was surprising, you know, slowly, families are coming in here too. You know, when they hear that a family of four can come in here on dollar taco night and feed their family for less than twenty bucks. If you go to McDonalds, you can't do that these days. That's why the biggest complaint that I've always heard from local people is that it's expensive to eat on the square.

Interviewer 1: Yes.

Bobby: So we try to lower our prices. But at the same time, we say as well, too, for us to lower our prices, we have high overhead, as well. You know, people are always saying, "Why are you guys charging four dollars for a beer?" It's not just four dollars for a beer price. You have to have liquor liability insurance. You know, somebody comes in here and anything happens, you know, you have assault and battery. You have so much insurance that you have to get. I pay \$18,000 a year just in liquor liability just in case somebody gets hurt at Locals. You know, we have to make sure that we cover it and all that stuff depending on what's going on. If it's someone I know, I'll take the time to explain to them that you're not just paying four dollars for a beer. If you go to a gas station, yes, you can buy that beer for ninety-three cents, but then you have to add the costs of the environment. I'm giving you the ambiance to sit and listen to the music. You guys don't have three hundred channels on your Direct TV at home, all your sports packages, and everything else. That's what the point of this place is.

Interviewer 2: Do you think that your clientele would change from the daytime to sort of the nighttime crowd?

Bobby: Yes. We do have a lot of students that love Locals. And they love our deals. We have five dollar martinis today, it's Tini Tuesdays. We have thirty-plus martinis on our menu. And that's the thing. I've traveled to other towns to see what concept actually works and then try to bring it to Oxford, you know?

Interviewer 1: What other specials do you have?

Bobby: Mondays, we do two-for-one margaritas. We call it "Margarita Monday." We do dollar tacos on Monday. Tuesdays, we do five dollar martinis, twenty-five cents wings. We do two dollar tacos today and we do two-for-one burgers today as well, too. Proud Mary's started doing two-for-one, so we started doing two-for-one.

Bobby: Wednesdays, we try to bring wing specials back. We try to do more fifty cents wings. We try to keep the food as cheap as possible for the kids, you know? That's what the point is, because, make it affordable. I mean, I wish I had this place when I was in college. You didn't have anything on the square that was doing any specials that happen now, in 2003-2004. It wasn't here.

Interviewer 3: Tell about your brunch specials on Sundays.

Bobby: We do twelve dollar bottomless mimosas as well, too.

[laughter]

Interviewer 1: I need to write that down.

Interviewer 3: Right? I need to remember that.

Bobby: We do bottomless mimosas on Sundays, our brunch menu is very popular. People love our shrimp and grits, they love our eggs benedict, you know, fried green tomato BLT. We have fried crawfish po'boys, we have catfish po'boys, and everything else. And that's what the point is. Roland wrote that menu. A guy actually wrote that menu. So, that's what the point is. He doesn't have a specialty. He can cook whatever you want to. He can make a dish called "catfish bananas" that tastes wonderful.

Interviewer 1: What is it called?

Bobby: Catfish bananas.

Interviewer 2: I've never heard of that.

Interviewer 1: What is that?

Bobby: We used to have it on the menu. It's more like sautéed bananas and he takes catfish and sautées the juice of the bananas in it. He uses spices and everything else and makes it and puts the sauce on top of it. Some people that like sour and sweet taste? It tastes wonderful.

Interviewer 1: That's interesting. We'll have to mention that. Very unique.

Bobby: Yeah, we hold rehearsal dinners here. I've held rehearsal dinners for people who've had a thousand dollar budget. I've held rehearsal dinners for people who had rehearsal dinners for nine thousand dollars. If somebody comes to me and works with me, I'll work with them. Any fraternity that wants to do a rent over here, they don't have big budget. I'll actually lower the prices as much as I can to help the fraternities out for their social [inaudible]. So, it's not like we're trying to be as greedy as possible and take as much money. But, we're a newer business on the square, too. And students are slowly starting to like us.

Interviewer 2: I'm just curious. Can you tell the difference between a student and a local when they come in here?

Bobby: Yeah. You tell how they act. You tell how they speak.

Interviewer 1: Can you give us more details?

Bobby: You can tell how they are, comparatively. You can tell between a student and a local person. You can talk in terms of Oxford. How many people do you have in this town? Altogether 45,000, right? So, 18,000 – 20,000 are all close to students. 25,000 are faculty that work on the square, people who have the square between campus. People that have jobs around here. Most are medium income. Maybe 45-50,000? They buy a house. Who's going to come spend money on the square? So, comparatively, you have a target market. There are two hundred-plus restaurants in Oxford. That includes fast food as well, too. You consider Wendy's and Subway, that's considered a restaurant as well. Every food location. So now, if you're targeting everything else, how are you supposed to survive? You know, compared to on the square. How many bars are on the square? You know, you're just trying to get people in the door.

Interviewer 2: I know I've heard that sometimes, after hours or in the evenings, you have international students in here. So, how do they know to come here? Do they ever just come hang out when you're not here?

Bobby: They've learned, you know, that I own this place. They know my dad is the present advisor for the Indian association.

Interviewer 1: There is one on campus. That's what we were saying.

Bobby: Indian student organization. There's actually Indian night April the ninth. You should go see that, it's pretty good.

Interviewer 1: When is that? April...

Bobby: April the ninth. It's like they bring in Indian cultures, Indian dances. They have Indian food coming from like Memphis.

Interviewer 1: I'll have to let my students know. That's great.

Bobby: Yeah, so it's actually pretty good. You should make it.

Interviewer 1: I'll have to give them some extra credit. That's what I do. If they go, extra credit.

Bobby: They'll actually like it, you know. They show them different parts, like proper Indian traditional dances. They have different food. It just makes them more cultured. They'll have the Punjabi dances, they have the Sikhs that wear the turbans. They have their dances. Everybody has a different type, and they'll mix it with an American theme and they'll teach them how to do it that way. It actually started when I came here in 2002.

Interviewer 1: The association?

Bobby: Indian's association, yeah.

Interviewer 1: And it's called the Indian Student Association?

Bobby: Yeah, Indian Students Association.

Interviewer 3: Do you know how many, approximately, members there are?

Bobby: It used to be a lot bigger? But, like I said, the graduate student thing has gone down, but I'm pretty sure there's still a hundred, two hundred people in it. Comparatively.

Interviewer 2: Were you a member, back in the day?

Bobby: I was, back in the day. I've actually danced in those things, too.

Interviewer 1: Really? That's exciting.

Bobby: When I was younger, but, I wouldn't do it anymore.

Interviewer 2: Oh, I would pay to see that.

Bobby: I'm pretty sure there's some video somewhere.

[laughter]

Interviewer 2: So, do you think you've created a sort of community with Locals, with international students? Or was that what you were trying to do? Is it by design?

Bobby: Not really. People say, "When you opened Locals, is that what you were trying to do?" But, it was to support the local community. It wasn't strictly to say that I didn't want the students to come in, I just want the locals to come in. That was never the thing. That was one of the things in the first six months. Did I want just locals to come in? Did I not want students to come in? I'm like, no. The name Locals mission statement was to support local communities. You know, give back to every fundraiser. When we have a fundraising team come in, we have not said "no" once. We've donated more than ten, probably twenty, thirty thousand dollars. You know, we let them come here, we sell food at cost, and let them charge cover at the door.

Bobby: Rebelthon, you know, we donated \$4,000 to them. Two different times the last two years. We did the Big Event here. We donated money to them for whatever big event happened. Different charities, you know, hospitals. They came here, I tell the student organizations I not going to donate physical money to you, but I will let you use my menu for free to use as you see fit. That's what we did for the [inaudible] charity bowl tomorrow. So if they come in here, they'll charge a cover and the money goes... There was the cop that actually got paralyzed. So we are doing ridiculous food specials. Three-for-one wells, you know. We do a lot of food specials and drink specials to get the crowd in here so it's not that expensive. And we pay for the labor, we pay for all the food, and at the same time, we donate all the cover charges to whatever cause. I tell them, "I'm not going to do the marketing for you. You have to work hard for this." And some charities, you can tell that are lazy, they come in and they just want a

donation. I say, "No, I'm not going to give you a physical donation. I'll give you my menu that I pay \$7,000 a month for. Come use the menu, that's technically a donation for you. If you want to do it, I'm happy to let you do it." Some people that are lazy, I never hear from them. Some kids are excited, they want to do it, and we've done at least ten of them in the last fall and spring semester.

Interviewer 1: Would you say that you're one of the few businesses that do that? That opens its doors to students?

Bobby: I think so...I think other bars do it as well, too. I'm not going to say they don't do it. Library does it, too. He does one very big one a year which is the St. Jude one. So, that's all he does. That's what his wife's choice of charity is. That's all he supports. Me, we support whatever charity walks in. We don't have a certain one that we just want to support.

Interviewer 1: Do you feel like there's an identifiable Indian community here in Oxford?

Bobby: Not really, no.

Interviewer 1: So everyone's just kind of isolated

Bobby: I don't have that many Indian friends. It's different, too, because most of the Indians that are here are Patels . . . So, they all hang out, and they're younger than me, too, comparatively. There's not very many thirty-year-old Indians in this town.

Interviewer 1: Mostly students?

Bobby: Yeah. Mostly students that are younger and everything else. They're older than me, or they're very younger than me. Like most Patels, like Chan Patel, he's in his fifties, that owns all the Holiday Inns and Hampton Inns.

Interviewer 1: Oh, one person owns them all.

Bobby: Yeah. And Rocky Patel owns the University Inn. Nash Patel owns the Comfort Inn. So, every hotel in this town, except the Graduate, is owned by all Indians.

Interviewer 2: I've got a question. What about Mike? That hangs out with us all the time.

Bobby: It's about like me hanging out with you. It's kind of like, I mentor him. He does what I ask him. If he needs help, I help him out. He's from the same caste as I am. He's a Punjabi guy, so we like hang out with him all the time. He comes to Locals all the time. He's about to graduate, you know, so he's a little bit older. He's like twenty-five. So, comparatively, he's a lot older. We hang out with him all the time. But, there's not a big Indian community presence. There is students here that are there, but comparatively it's not you'll see a lot of Indians everywhere.

Interviewer 3: Have there been any challenges running Locals, like with employees and a transient student population?

Bobby: I've fired more than 360 people in the last three years. I mean, it's not like we fired them. One of the worst things about bars is...I come from a corporate structure business. I don't like to repeat myself. It's not like I'm saying I'm very harsh. But, like, not showing up to work, showing up to work drunk. Like, football. We go through so much staff during football season. We have a late game, somebody's working the night shift, they'll go to the Grove. You can't serve alcohol drunk. It's a liability towards us. You serve somebody, you can't be drunk behind the bar, you can't drink behind the bar, if you serve someone and [inaudible] walks in, we'll lose our liquor license. Stealing from us. That's one of the hardest parts about a bar, kids giving away drinks to their own friends. That's a very big problem in the bar business. And I understand a little bit. A little bit has to be given away and everything else. But, some kids are more popular and they give it away to a couple of their friends. And we see that, and that's okay to give it away to a couple of them. But, if you give it to ten people who are coming in here, and I only have fifty customers, you just gave my bar away. And that's a big issue, as well, too, at the same time. You know, a lot of bars close down . . . I saw a bar go under in front of me. He used to do very well. The owner didn't know how to manage it properly. And it's a fact, too, that one in three businesses close down in America because of employee fraud. That's a statistical fact. Employee fraud is a big issue and small entrepreneurs cannot survive. And there's not much you can do about it. I mean, and that's what the point is. When you are a tipped employee? That's the biggest problem that happens. They get paid \$2.13 an hour, they're tipped employees, so they make their money through tips. So, they think they're giving drinks away, they think they're going to get more tips. That's the biggest challenge, you know, is the work ethic sometimes. They're students, too, so they're learning, and you can't get angry, but you can't tolerate it either. I tell them, at the same time, we'll give you chances. It's not like we just fire people. And now if they won't show up once, we give them a chance. Sometimes they'll say, "Well, I got too drunk and I couldn't make it." Or whatever it is, that's just a college student thing. And there's not too many professionals here that want to be a professional waitress, you know? So, that's why we always have high turnover as well, too.

Interviewer 1: I can imagine.

Interviewer 3: Have there ever been confrontations between customers, or with customers and you?

Bobby: There have. There have been confrontations. You know, there was the kid that broke the window. He threw his friend through the window. So, we had to change the window. We've had to change every wall in our bathrooms. These tables are wobbly because some kid probably fell on it.

Interviewer 1: In the bathroom, is it writing on the wall?

Bobby: No, they punch it. Or ripping the commode out of the bathroom. But, that's the bar business challenges. That's why we have insurance, and that's why we have liability. But, that happens everywhere. Even then, I never send them to jail. I just say pay for the window. I will not do that. I mean I know that kids get drunk, and they're younger and everything else. So, we'll give them the best opportunity to take care of it. "You made a mistake, you'll pay for your mistake." I've told them work it off. He came and worked off the payment for the window.

Interviewer 1: It's better than getting arrested.

Bobby: That's what the point is. I mean, yeah. After a while, a lot of owners have gotten tired of it, too, you know? They just don't care. But, if somebody makes a mistake, we try to avoid...Unless somebody gets hurt really bad, then we have to involve the police and everything else, but that's the most challenges that we've had.

Interviewer 3: What are some of your most positive memories in Oxford? And any negative memories?

Bobby: I don't really have that many negative moments, you know? I've felt sometimes like an outsider. I miss my family. But, I love the Grove. I've always enjoyed going to football games. I'm probably the most die-hard Ole Miss fan. I've enjoyed growing up here. I came here as a fifteen-year-old kid, you know, who went to school here. Now, I'm thirty years old and kind of have my own business. You know, so in the same sense, I guess if it wasn't for Oxford, I probably wouldn't have it. I couldn't do this interview with you guys ten years ago. My English was different. My speaking skills have gotten better. My socializing skills have gotten so much better through Ole Miss. I have more of a [inaudible] that I have through Ole Miss. It's changed things in a lot of ways.

Interviewer 3: So, your negative memories are just...

Bobby: Missing home, yeah. Missing my brothers. You know, my brothers never came here the second time. They went to colleges in India, so. My older brother is thirty-four and my oldest brother is thirty-seven. So, they were already in college when I was in tenth grade. So my dad didn't want to pull them out of college when we came over here in 2001. So, they just stayed there. And after 9/11, my brothers tried to get a visa a couple of times and they couldn't get it. So, that was an issue as well, too. So, like, my little brother's visa got rejected a few times. And there was no reason, it was like literally, why would you not give it? His dad's a professor here, you know, we come from a reputable family. It became like a lottery system. Somebody might get it, somebody might not get it. They didn't have any proper reasons to tell people no.

Interviewer 1: The next thing that we're curious about. It's been in the last two or three years while we've all been on campus, there's been a lot of racial incidents and in the media, you hear about it. When you were on campus, were there any incidents that were similar.

Bobby: There was. But that never really offended me. If somebody's going to be vulgar and everything else, I just let it go. I just never retaliated to it.

Interviewer 1: Oh, directed at you, okay.

Bobby: It was directed toward me. But, I've always seen, it always happens. Some people always say something. But Oxford, it's changed, you know. I think it was probably worse back then than it is now. You have more punishment for it now.

Interviewer 1: Were there any incidents that were picked up by the media? Big things like the statue here?

Bobby: Not that I remember, no. Nothing like the James Meredith statue, no. But, the statue wasn't there when I was there. The statue was put afterwards.

Interviewer 1: How would you describe race relations? One of the things we see here are, certainly in papers that I get from students, there's always this black/white binary because the demographics are large.

Bobby: I guess I'm in the middle, so I don't really know. I've always dated American girls, so I always felt like people didn't like it that I dated an American girl. So, in that sense you could see that somebody might say something. But, in the same thing, I'm the only non-white person that owns something on the square, technically. That really hasn't affected [inaudible] hasn't tried. I don't think that makes a difference on campus. So, yes, there's always going to be segregation everywhere. It's the same thing, I think Indian people have segregation. Like, on campus, Indians always hang out on campus. They always hang out together. Even when you see them here, there's not just one of them, there's like thirty of them that come out.

Interviewer 1: That's a lot.

Bobby: So, like thirty of them would come to Locals and thirty of them would go to another bar. They always go together. They're all a similar age and they hang out together.

Bobby: Or if you see a group of black people, there's a lot of them that come in together. It's different to say, but segregation is always going to be there in a lot of ways. It's just something that you can't change. It's a topic as a business owner that I'm not supposed to comment too much. And I'm like, what am I supposed to say?

Interviewer 1: Of course, always a sensitive topic. The next thing we were curious about, what is your impression of the student population? When you were there and then now? Since you're a business owner attracting the students.

Bobby: Comparatively, I've learned certain things. The Greeks go out more. The bar's run by the Greek crowd. Fraternities and Sororities and everything else. Sometimes they don't like it and they'll try to avoid going to a bar that has a lot of Greek events in it. But that's just how it is. And I've probably actually going to break that barrier a lot. We have non-Greeks that come here, as well, too. And we have Greek people who come here at the same time. It's just, we have to cater to somebody who spends money. Some people come in here and order more stuff, but you can see as you go around the square, the same type of crowd that loves to go out and socialize, you'll see the same people out all the time. And that's why the population, and back then it was the same way as well, too. That's how the Ole Miss tradition stays the same. The non-Greeks don't go out, they stay at home and drink at home. The Greeks are going out and partying. But, there are so many of them. Comparatively, if you look at the student population. Phi Deltas, how many Phi Deltas were there in 2003?

Interviewer 2: Chapter wise?

Bobby: Yeah, chapter wise.

Interviewer 2: Probably over two hundred.

Bobby: And now you guys are double, probably?

Interviewer 2: Yeah.

Bobby: So, you're talking about in just ten years, the brothers in the fraternity have doubled. The Tri Deltas have four hundred some girls. Back then, there was probably less than that. So everything has changed a lot compared to the population growing as well, too.

Interviewer 3: Do you think that it has anything to do with their economic background? Because, if you're Greek, you pay to be Greek, and if you're going out a lot...

Bobby: You'd be surprised at how many Greeks take student loans out to *be* in the Greek. It looks a lot like, you know how I said pretentious? There's a lot of kids that take out a lot of loans that don't come from very rich backgrounds to be in the fraternity because they think that it's going to give them an upward status.

Interviewer 3: I didn't know you could take out a loan and fund it, too.

Bobby [*speaking to others who just entered the space*]: How's it going, group?

Interviewer 1: You said that your experience here has been very positive, so if you had children, would you encourage them to come to Ole Miss?

Bobby: I'll let them go wherever they want.

Interviewer 1: Wherever they want, okay.

Bobby: If they want to go here, I would hope they go here.

Interviewer 1: Okay, so you want them to.

Bobby: But, if they don't want to go here, that's fine.

Interviewer 2: Talk to me a little bit about the Grove, and going there, and having interactions with others.

Bobby: It's fun, socializing. Now I use the Grove as a marketing thing. We take out coozies, we take out coupons...For me now everything is about Locals. Everything I do. You know, even when I go out somewhere, I try to get people to come back with me.

Interviewer 2: We always end up here.

Bobby: Before that, it was a fun, socializing event for me. I enjoyed it. I love going to football games. I've had season tickets for the last fifteen years. One year I had the south end zone tickets for a couple of years, too. When I was working for corporate America, you know, I could spend that kind of money. Made my bosses actually buy the tickets for me. I had them put that in my executive contract. So like, I

made them buy me south end zone tickets. That was one of the benefits, yeah. I do whatever I can. I always donate money to the alumni center. Whatever I can do to help Ole Miss, I usually do it.

Interviewer 2: I know you kind of alluded to this earlier, but just for me, I want to know what it was like for you to be Greek. Did you enjoy that?

Bobby: [*This portion of the interview is deleted at the request of the interviewee.*]

Interviewer 2: Moving on. When you were in college, what did you do for fun, basically?

Bobby: I played a lot of golf. Golf is one of my favorite things. I used to be on a cricket team when I was in college. There were a lot more international students here. Now, there are more American Indian students here. And there were more international Indian students here when I was in college. So we used to play cricket in the [*inaudible*]. I used to enjoy doing that. I used to play a lot of table tennis in the Turner Center. I actually didn't really start going out on the square until probably my junior year. I guess, until I turned twenty-one.

Interviewer 2: I guess you kind of hit on all the parts of that question, but I guess if you just want to reiterate. You said you played cricket and you're a huge Ole Miss fan.

Bobby: I went to all the football games.

Bobby: Not the basketball games. I really, I'm not. I love football. And I wanted to really learn the game. So I just learned it in high school. There were really a lot of intramural tennis. Tournaments. I played that. And I tried to be as much active as I could, you know. I used to play, when I was younger in India, I used to play national cricket, my state under-fourteen team.

Interviewer 1: Oh okay.

Bobby: So, I used to do that. I never got a chance to play any sports when I moved over here, when I was fifteen, sixteen. They had baseball and football and [*a noise distracts Bobby as he's speaking*] that's what they had over here.

Interviewer 3: When you were here, did you interact with other international students?

Bobby: I did. There was like, Sam. You know the advising software you have on campus, for business school?

Interviewer 3: The what?

Bobby: The advising software that you have when you register for classes?

Interviewer 3: Yeah.

Bobby: Sam wrote that software. He was one of my classmates.

Interviewer 1: Really? Wow. That's impressive.

Bobby: A lot of my friends, some of my international friends moved away. Some of them went back and decided not to stay here.

Interviewer 3: What were their impressions of Oxford? Do you think?

Bobby: You know, they started going out more when they became my friends. I forced them to go out on the square. My Indian friends, when I first started going out my junior year? My freshman sophomore year, they wouldn't go out. They would always stay at the house. So when I wanted to start going out, I forced other people to go out, as well, too. I mean, it is a little bit scary. I'm like, why do I want to go to another bar, you know. I'm in a different country. People don't feel safe, you know, you always feel like outsiders, but you have to put yourself out there to learn about somebody else's culture.

Interviewer 1: Would there be international students from other countries that would all come together?

Bobby: Yeah. Even my friends now, we had friends from Russia, different parts and everything else. We had Sam from Lebanon. We had somebody from Jordan, you know. We had somebody from Thailand, different friend groups. Whenever we wanted to hang out, we would all go out together.

Interviewer 1: How about where individuals lived. Would it be together? Or off-campus? I know you said there was a place where a lot of international students lived.

Interviewer 2: University Trails.

Bobby: It used to be called the strolling apartments back then.

Interviewer 1: What was it called?

Bobby: University Trails used to be called the strolling apartments. That's when I was in school and there were a lot of international students there as well. A lot of international students used to live behind the Regions on Jackson near the Oxford Square townhomes. That's where they used to live as well.

Bobby: But, I mean, I never really had to live anywhere because my parents, my dad had a house here. He bought me a house my junior year in college. So, I never lived on campus. I didn't have to live on campus. So, comparatively, my experience was a little bit different. And international students that don't have any family here, they have support from my mom and dad.

Interviewer 1: Did your parents end up being kind of surrogate parents? Did they interact a lot with your friends?

Bobby: Yeah. I mean, my dad still does everything for the Indian students.

Interviewer 2: So, there is a sense of community...

Bobby: My dad helps out a lot. He tries to keep the Indian students together. He does what he can. I mean, he tried to build a temple in Oxford. So, he actually bought land going towards Batesville on 6. He

wants to get the business owner Indians to donate money so we can build one. So, we're working on that as well, too. It just takes time.

Interviewer 1: Well, the closest one is in Memphis you said, right?

Bobby: Yeah. The closest one is in Memphis, yes. They have like a temple in Tupelo, too, that's like for Punjabi people. But, the Patels are not going to go there, you know. If you build a different temple, they'll go to that one over here.

Interviewer 1: When people go, is it something daily? or weekly?

Bobby: It all depends on the person. I have to be dragged to go? But my mom prays every morning, they go every Sunday, they go whenever they get time. I mean, I'm religious because of my mom. That's one of those things.

Interviewer 1: Okay. We had a question about whether or not you experienced discrimination, but we talked about that already. There's always something. There's those little subtle things.

Bobby: There always is. You know, there's been things that people have said to me over here. But, I mean, you have to ignore them and you can't say anything about it. You let it be...you can't make a big deal about it if somebody is making any racial comments.

Interviewer 1: So, that's just kind of your strategy. Silence, this is what I've got.

Interviewer 3: Is that because you're a business owner, or is that just kind of your philosophy?

Bobby: It's just how I think. I just don't have time for annoying people. It's kind of like *[inaudible]* Gandhi. I don't want to be Gandhi, but.

Interviewer 1: For the most part, you always feel comfortable in the community.

Bobby: I've always felt comfortable. I feel old now that I'm in Oxford, but. Sometimes when I hang out with them, I feel old *[laughter]*. One thing about Oxford, you know, they always say it's like a velvet ditch. Right? It's like a term for Oxford. And I've always wanted something here, so I did it. I don't know if I'll be here for the rest of my life.

Bobby: But, you know, I miss the bigger cities. You know, I lived in bigger cities when I worked for companies...I lived in Chicago for a while, I lived in Knoxville, I lived in Nashville. I lived in Phoenix, Arizona. Every company I was with, they were so big. I lived in Knoxville, and my boss called me on Thursday and he said, "Pack your bags, you're going to Nashville in three days." So, I packed my bags and I moved in three days.

Interviewer 1: And stayed there how long?

Bobby: I was in Nashville for about a year.

Interviewer 1: Oh wow. So, three days to move permanently.

Bobby: But, then after that, I was moved to Chattanooga. After that, I started not buying anything. I lived in like one-bedroom apartments that had furnished apartments and I lived out of a suitcase. I was moved, TG Capital, moved me six times in the four-year period that I worked for them.

Interviewer 2: I didn't know this. You didn't tell me you lived in Chattanooga.

[inaudible conversation]

Bobby: I lived in a hotel, like Double Tree, downtown *[Chattanooga]*.

Interviewer 2: Okay.

Bobby: I just started expensing the hotels, and billing it to my company.

Interviewer 3: So, you consider yourself southern.

Bobby: In a way, yeah. I guess I can say "y'all" every once in a while.

[laughter]

Bobby: I've been told I have a southern foreign accent sometimes. But, I've been here most of *[inaudible]*.

Interviewer 1: The last things we wanted to ask about, and you mentioned this, just the changes you've observed here in Oxford, the growth, since you were a student, or since high school.

Bobby: Yeah, it's grown a lot. Comparatively, the restaurants on the square. If you go back to 2001, the restaurants have grown on the square, the bar presence has grown on the square. Jackson Avenue being two-lane is four-lane now. The Walmart brought so many things around it, the shopping malls. You know, Chili's and Applebee's have been there for a while, but there are so many franchise restaurants. You know, Panera Bread, Starbucks opening. All that wasn't here at that time.

Interviewer 1: So Applebee's...

Bobby: Yeah, Applebee's has been around for a while, but now Chili's opened up. The Home Depot coming, it came after Walmart. Office Depot coming, Belk coming. In fact, the land that the Belk is on used to be Indian families that owned that land. They used to have a hotel called Johnson Motor Inn there. They sold it to the Belk's and they built that property. You know, the Belk store. So much has changed, comparatively, just on Jackson. So many new restaurants and everything is open. Traffic is a lot bigger than...

Bobby: They used to have *[inaudible]* lanes. Where Wing Stop is, they used to have a bowling alley in that place, but it got burned down. Now, we just got Premier Lanes now, we didn't have a bowling alley here for almost ten years. So, Oxford's changed a lot. Every time when I left after college and would come back, it would look different. I mean, campus, if you've seen, campus has grown so much. When I started at Aramark, Aramark has probably spent thirty million dollars on renovating Aramark properties. If you talk about Johnson Commons, if you're talking about Chikfila, the union's been renovated so many

times. I mean, Aramark has put a lot of money on campus to make Ole Miss better than it was. And they did marketing survey that said that no student would walk more than five minutes to a food location. So now, if you look at it, there's a food location within five minutes of every building. That's a marketing survey that we did back in 2008. I mean the flex, my manager John brought [it] in to every campus. People use that, parents don't have to put in money all the time. So, that's making those students to have eating options. And most students who spend more time on campus have a better chance of doing better in school than people who are leaving and coming back. You might get bored and you might start reading and studying. Students who stay on campus and go to classes are more likely to do better than students who keep leaving and coming back.

Interviewer 1: How about housing? Have you seen growth there?

Bobby: Apartment complexes, yes. It's crazy.

Interviewer 1: So you've seen new ones.

Bobby: Yeah, they're popping up everywhere. I mean, there's not enough freshman rooms on campus so. You know, comparatively, when the housing market busted in 2008. And now, people are building all these houses now. Like, there's so many apartment complexes. If you just look on Old Taylor Road, Taylor Bend wasn't there, if you start at the University, that was the only apartment. Now you have Hub, the Connection, *[inaudible]*. Now, if you look at the University Trails, that was the only apartments that were between there were the Mark apartments. The Mark apartments were the only thing there until you got to Taylor. Now, you have *[inaudible]*. So, there's so much growth on that side as well, too. *[Recording is becoming more inaudible. It sounds like someone might be counting change into a register drawer.]* If you look at, what is that, where the Retreat is, behind the *[inaudible]*, there used to be trailer parks back there back in Oxford.

Interviewer 3: That was going to be one of my questions, the lower class is getting pushed further and further.

Bobby: Yeah, like the Keystone Cottages, that used to be the trailer park of Oxford.

Bobby: So, that's not there anymore. So, comparatively, with the growth of all of that coming in, they just moved everybody away. I don't even know where they went.

Interviewer 3: What used to be where the trailer parks?

Bobby: Keystone Cottages.

Interviewer 1: For some of these business owners you've mentioned. Some of these owners that you said are Indian, do they live in the community? Or do a lot of individuals live elsewhere and...

Bobby: What was the question again?

Interviewer 1: I was just curious about some of those business owners you mentioned.

Bobby: Do they live here? I think that Chan Patel lives in Wellsgate. Nash lives, well my parents' house is in Wellsgate, too. Nash Patel lives somewhere behind West Oxford Loop.

Interviewer 1: So, the owners are all here.

Bobby: Yeah, they all live here. They made their money from Oxford. Like, they started their businesses here and they've been here for a while. Chan Patel is very influential in the community, like he owns both the Holiday Inn and the Marriott right here, both on Jackson Avenue right here as well, too.

Interviewer 1: Would you say his name again? I want to try and get a hold of him and see...

Bobby: I can get you his number.

Interviewer 1: Would you? That would be wonderful, especially if he's, as you said, very influential, it would be interesting to see what he has to say as well. And the last thing is, is there anything else that we should know? Or that you'd like to add? Anything else about business that would be good for us to know?

Bobby: I probably told you pretty much everything. It's just some of the questions that you guys have about Hindu religions, if you guys can come up with the questions, I can get you more detailed answers. You know, me, I know about my religion, but I just do what I'm told. I just don't know. Indian culture, Hindu culture is very interesting compared to all the gods and everything else. But I think you guys would really like it if you go over there on Indian night April the ninth.

Interviewer 1: I think that's all the questions unless you have anything that you're curious about?

Interviewer 2: Do you still have Roland's number?

Bobby: Yes. I can get that for you. Roland can tell you a lot. He's seen Memphis grow and Roland's been in America probably forty-some years.

1:26:46 [*Interview concluded*]