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**Oral History Interview with Neela Miller**  
**Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations, 2011.019.071**

**Interview conducted by Manissa McCleave Maharawal on January 16th, 2014 in Alameda, California.**

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: [00:00:00] So we are recording now. Let me just prep the interview by saying this is Manissa McCleave Maharawal interviewing Neela Miller, my cousin on January --

NEELA MILLER: Sixteenth.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: January 16<sup>th</sup>. Thank you. Twenty thirteen.

NEELA MILLER: Fourteen. (laughs)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Twenty fourteen. OK and January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014 in Alameda, California, which is where she lives now. OK Neela, do you want to just tell me your full name and where and when you were born.

NEELA MILLER: I'm Neela Akash Miller. I was born in Brooklyn, New York [date redacted for privacy]

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: (laughs) OK. So do you want to describe for me your earliest childhood memory?

NEELA MILLER: The earliest childhood memory, and I'm not sure if it's totally fabricated (laughs) or not, but it actually involves you at what may have been like my second birthday party or something, and we were sitting on the floor of Ila Maasi's house and I had -- I had eaten cake and (inaudible)-- I was eating it with my fingers I guess, and I was licking at the cake off my fingers like I had thought it was very classy to do. (laughs) I thought it was a very classy thing to do, and I just -- I remember you were sitting next to

me. It one of my earliest -- I don't, yeah -- I remember receiving a Glow Worm toy as well. (laughs) And that was, yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: I wonder where you got the idea that it was classy to lick your fingers from.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, because it's definitely not in a family that eats with their hands. Nobody licked their fingers ever. (laughs) That's not -- that's not something that is done. I think I saw it on a cartoon or something.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: So we're at this family party. Where was it? Do you remember?

NEELA MILLER: It's at Ila Maasi's house.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Oh, it was Ila Maasi's house, so in Brooklyn.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, we were in Brooklyn in the living room sitting on the floor. I remember the -- the couch, and we were like right by the doorway where the hallway is behind us. Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Do you have any other childhood memories you want to describe?

NEELA MILLER: Well, other early childhood memories include getting scars (laughs) and stuff like that. I have a -- one thing about my childhood that I know now that I have no memory of was speaking Hindi actually which, at some point, we found a recording of me speaking Hindi with Nani. I was like very small, so I was speaking, like, two-year-olds' Hindi but I was saying stuff that I didn't -- I couldn't recognize now as like what it was, but it was clear that it happened (laughs) because there was a recording of it and everyone

knew it was me. So that was funny to discover later on. It was like when I was a teenager or something, we found all these old cassette tapes, and one of them had that on there.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: But you don't remember it?

NEELA MILLER: No, I don't remember speaking Hindi like that. I have no memory of being -- having that sort of fluidity with the language.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: How old do you think you were?

NEELA MILLER: Probably, again, around two years old maybe. One or two years old because I think by the time I was three or four we had moved to California for a couple years and then I lost whatever comfort level I had had with the language. So.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Why do you think that is?

NEELA MILLER: Why did I lose the comfort level? Because my mother was not motivated to keep me speaking the language, or maybe she didn't think about it and just thought that -- maybe she assumed that I would just keep -- retain that knowledge or something because it had never been an issue, or something. So.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: None of us really grew up knowing how to speak Hindi.

NEELA MILLER: No.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Why do you think that is? I have my own theories but.

NEELA MILLER: Well, [00:05:00] and a pretty big part is not ha -- being forced to speak it in the home and also not, especially between you and I, we didn't grow up with two Indian parents who spoke the same language so. Oh, and we didn't hear it often enough, and I think that I had that little period of being able to speak Hindi because I spent so much

time at Nani's house with Nani and Ila Maasi both speaking Hindi and people speaking Hindi in the home. But yeah, otherwise, they would have had to put this effort into it that I think maybe it didn't occur to them to try more. In the midst of other stuff going on, it wasn't on the top of their list, which now maybe they would feel differently but it's hard to have that kind of foresight without seeing it happen before maybe?

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: What do you mean?

NEELA MILLER: Like they may -- maybe had never had any relatives who didn't speak Hindi because they didn't grow up in the same country or something along those lines.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: My father often says, when people ask him if we speak Hindi, "No, they never learned it" as if there is --

NEELA MILLER: Like it was your fault. (laughs) Yeah, yeah. And that's hard because then like I do feel a little bit like oh, I should have tried harder, but there is so little -- like I couldn't have taken it in school. I couldn't have like -- there wasn't -- there wasn't a time where oh, like a lot of kids, Japanese kids, go to Japanese school on the weekends, or Korean kids go to Korean school on the weekends, and like that just wasn't ever a thing that happened. And now I'm like yeah, maybe I would have hated it as a kid having to go, but I think I would have felt more grounded in the -- even in the culture as a whole besides the language skills, but to -- just to feel like oh, I know other people. Because we grew up very removed from Indian culture aside from our immediate family, and to have some other connection with Indian people, which my mom would try every once in a while. There was like a few other Indian kids at my school, and my mom would befriend them and we would go over but it's just not our style. (laughs) Like they would try but it's like oh, they eat too much meat or like oh, there's not really a connection other than being

from the same country as a whole, which is not much to go on (laughs) as friendships go.

Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: That's something I also wonder about, why we didn't grow up with like a large Indian community around us and like, we didn't live in places where there were a lot of Indians. Could have, we knew which neighborhoods they were.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah. Or it seems almost like a conscious choice that they chose not to live in places with a lot of Indians.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Why do you think that is? Do you have any idea?

NEELA MILLER: I think our family is quite reclusive actually (laughs) they're like, as a bunch, the -- they are. Even my mother who's maybe the most sociable, but it's like it's still not -- and that might be in part because of my father; but I think she doesn't -- having social interactions is like well? OK. Or liking people enough, something (laughs) like that. Liking people enough to want to spend time with them. I don't know. Just -- just a strange thing because I think all of us kids are very social, except for Rajiv. Rajiv got a bit of the anti-- (laughs) antisocial qualities.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah. Yeah, those are two things I think about. One is the language, and then the other is like why weren't there more Indians around growing up.

NEELA MILLER: Mm-hmm, because it's not like in New York City there was any lack of Indians.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: And when I think about those things, I often think that the fact that we came from mixed families had something to do with that.

NEELA MILLER: Like that they didn't feel comfortable being around people who were all Indian all the time because we were mixed?

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Mm-hmm, something like that, yeah. What do you think?

NEELA MILLER: Yeah. [00:10:00] I mean, also it would be more alienating for my father or for your mother if they lived in places that were very Indian. But Ila Maasi, like why didn't she live somewhere that was all -- or yeah, Ila Maasi and Nani, why did they not? They just landed somewhere and stayed there (laughs) more or less. It's like -- how it seems. I also -- the thought occurred to me just now about a class thing because I also think that they had a certain feeling of being like they want their close friends to be of the same caste or something like the other people aren't nec -- like they're not -- they might be Indians, but they're not actually the same and, yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah, I think that's true.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: I think, you know, I would be like, "Why didn't we grow up in like a Gujarati neighborhood" or something, you know, like there's such -- so many Gujaratis, right? When they were in Jackson Heights and now in Edison and stuff like that. And they're like, "Well, we're not really Gujarati."

NEELA MILLER: Right, even though they grew up in Gujarat but that's (laughs).

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah, which is interesting.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: I didn't understand that for a long time. What does that mean?



NEELA MILLER: Yeah, and when people ask you like oh, I say my mother is from India and they'll say oh, where in India? India? And I'll say, "Oh, Gujarat." And they're like, "Oh, Gujarati." OK, and I'm like (laughs), and I know that my mom doesn't identify that way. But I don't know. I'll say, "Oh, she's a Rajput." (laughs) "She's not Gujarati." (laughs)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah, because that's what they would say.

NEELA MILLER: Would they actually say that in conversation though? It seems very snobby.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: I think they would; somehow there would be a way that they would express that they were Rajputs.

NEELA MILLER: Without being so blatant about it?

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Mm-hmm.

NEELA MILLER: Well, I guess if it would -- if it came up with other Indians, they would say their last name and, or something.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Mm-hmm. Something like that. But I -- I think -- yeah, I think you're right that there were class differences, that they came to the United States, they moved here, but they weren't like all those other immigrants.

NEELA MILLER: Right.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: For some reason, who just came here to like, you know, open a business. You know, Banyias or something from Gujarat, and that they were different than them.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah. Yeah, that's probably actually a lot of it because I know that -- my mom now actually hangs out with her school friends. This is something that started happening, and I'm not sure what the evolution is. Like how come this is suddenly

possible? But she has a bunch of school friends that -- they meet up in -- somewhere in New Jersey, and there's enough of them around that like these are people she grew up going to school with and are somehow all in New Jersey now. (laughs) Or at least a large enough number, and there's like pictures, eight or nine of them together. It's pretty impressive. But she goes to that and feels some connection to them and interested, even after so many years. It's --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah. Yeah, I think the combination of a lot of things. I think also the speaking in Hindi thing when I really talk to my father about it, he says, "Well, your mom didn't know any Hindi. So I didn't you know, want to like be talking this language she didn't know to you."

NEELA MILLER: Yeah and -- but I -- because I had this, like I had started speaking Hindi, I feel now like, well, she could have just spoken to me. Like I had the beginnings of it already, like the language is in my mind, is in my mouth (laughs) and -- but it was just like not continued for some reason.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Have you talked to your mother about that?

NEELA MILLER: No. I don't want to put a guilt trip on her (laughs) seriously. That's all it would do at this point. Like I don't think -- I think that she probably regrets that in some degree and, yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: It's certainly something me and my father like argue about [00:15:00] because he has a sort of like, "No, they never learned any Hindi" when people ask him. And then I say, "He never taught me any Hindi."

NEELA MILLER: Yeah. (laughs) Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: So like there's this big opportunity to learn it and I just like covered my ears or something.

NEELA MILLER: Blew it off, yeah, yeah. Yeah, I would feel similarly. But I do feel actually that way when they -- when I do say something and my mom has a habit of just laughing in my face when I say something (laughs) and it's like help me instead maybe? Like.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah, yeah.

NEELA MILLER: And that goes into the whole thing of being not Indian and not -- but still Indian and like the fuzzy line of like where -- at what times is it important for me to be Indian and what times is it like they're going to laugh at me because I'm not Indian and (laughs) like. And it's interesting to deal with -- like I have had very little contact with the American white side of my family because my father's family is in Indiana, and how little that like identifying with that side has always been like well yeah, like I -- I am white also, or whatever that is. I'm Midwestern. (laughs) I don't know how to identify that but -- and that is also in part -- and my dad has gone into that because he got into genealogy and, while I was growing up, and looking at where his family really came from because like Nathan, my husband, has like -- he grew up -- nobody asked them -- asked him where his family is from, like do you identify as any ethnic background or anything. It -- just like everybody was white; and if you weren't white, you were black and that was it like (laughs) so. There's some Asian kid who, wherever he was from and, yeah. So it just -- like it always seemed important to me to always rec -- also recognize that side that that had some like equal importance in who I am that like because the Indian thing was so like -- it was so important to my mom in certain aspects and like being surrounded with that side of our family was like -- that -- that was what I identified as, and it felt always like

oh, it's an afterthought that my dad was even there a lot of the time. (laughs) Like in a physical way as much as in a like -- a whatever and heritage aspect. But yeah, as -- interesting searching for the definition of how that -- how those different sides would play out in who I am and in traditions, especially now, making my own like family home, family traditions, like how much do I celebrate Indian holidays? How do I celebrate them like? It was alwa -- it was never something that was taught to me, how to like make those things happen, but how to just like participate, just like I'm here and somebody tells me what I'm like -- OK, now you put the powder on their forehead, not that finger! (laughs) Other finger, other finger! (laughs) And they were so sporadic about celebrating those things, too, that it was like OK. Definitely takes effort to keep those things alive in the culture. That's so different. Nobody I knew celebrated Rakhi or Diwali or anything, even though I knew other Indian kids in school, but I didn't -- we didn't talk about that stuff I guess.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: So were other Indian kids in your school?

NEELA MILLER: Very few, very few. I didn't really ha -- like, we didn't hang. (laughs) And I would tell my mom about other kids, other like Patels. Other Pate -- (laughs) or whatever. You know. There was al -- I would tell her I heard the names of the other [00:20:00] Indian kids in my school, and then she would give me a back story, like what their family was about (laughs) or whatever. Or what Patels are like. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Did you feel lumped in with them in school though (inaudible)?

NEELA MILLER: Not at all.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: No.

NEELA MILLER: I think because I -- I was half, and I don't know -- you know, I don't think that kids growing up, people didn't really ask me like the -- what are you, air quotes (laughs) question, or where are you from because they knew I was from New Jersey or New York or (laughs) wherever, and like they didn't think I was a foreigner or something. But yeah, I -- yeah, I didn't ever feel -- I don't think there was enough Indians to be lumped together actually. There was just a few, and I don't think any, even the other Indians that I knew there, they didn't like hang out together unlike -- we had a huge Korean population. They all hung out together somehow but so different. It's funny because now, when I -- I'm more aware of seeing groups of Indians and, maybe it's just growing up in this country also. Like, you're like whatever, I can hang out with other Indians or I could not. Doesn't matter. (laughs) I don't see that tendency as much with like Ameri -- Indian Americans, where they like hang in gangs of other Indian Americans. At least in my experience. There is a little like interest but not like, you know?

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah.

NEELA MILLER: Not like I see groups of Korean Americans or groups of (inaudible) just Japanese Americans or...

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: I think the Korean thing in your career school, like all those kids all went to the same church and they went to the same Sunday school --

NEELA MILLER: Right.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: -- and the same Korean school.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, that's true. But the funny thing is, is that when we were little, it wasn't the case. When we were little, we all hung out together and then, as we got older

and like specifically transitioning to high school, all of a sudden, all the Korean kids hung out together and it was like -- a lot of my best friends had been Korean girls who suddenly were just interested in hanging out with the other Korean people. It was just a -- one of those like -- I guess in high school, you have new cliques and new (laughs) groups of people, and that was one of the groups was the Korean kids.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: So what was growing up in suburban New Jersey like?

NEELA MILLER: As a mixed person?

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Mm-hmm.

NEELA MILLER: Or any -- anything.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Generally as well.

NEELA MILLER: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) Actually, you know, there is this thing that -- I was always jealous of you growing up in the city because I -- and my mom was a help in that also because she loves the city and she loves going out and do -- like she loves culture and stuff happening, and so she always encouraged me to go to the city and wanted us to be connected to what was happening. And I just always felt like you guys had all these opportunities to like be involved in culture and see cool stuff that I had no connection to. And also, I felt this degree of acceptance that I could -- I felt like there was -- you fit in more where you were because there was more maybe mixed kids or whatever. I thought people were more open-minded. And in New Jersey I grew up -- there was, yeah, a lot of Korean kids; but for the most part, people were Italian and Irish, that kind of thing. And so like I just always felt a little different and, I mean -- and my friends were all different. I hung out with white girls, Asian girls, (inaudible) whoever, not too many

boys. (laughs) But yeah, when -- going to Shire [00:25:00] Village Camp was a big transition for me because all those kids, most of them, grew up in the city and I felt like a different kind of acceptance and like boys liked me, and boys didn't like me in New Jersey. Like that just -- it was -- I don't really -- like looking back now, I'm like I don't know why, what -- maybe I was who knows? (laughs) Whatever. I was a little bit of a weirdo, but that's -- kids are. (laughs) And -- and so that was a thing for me, feeling -- I felt that there was somewhere else where I would be more accepted and the -- there was something -- like I was a little out of place. But I've never felt like oh, like these are my (laughs), like this is my culture, and that is part of being mixed is that there is no place where they're -- people are like yes, everybody here is pretty much like you. Like same background or whatever. There doesn't exist. And yeah. So. Yeah, that was part of growing up and getting into -- and -- and that's why I decided to go to school in Brooklyn, at least partly, or to go to art school because I thought well, everybody is different in art school. (laughs) That's what draws people there. So, at least in part. So.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: So how was going to art school in Brooklyn? Did it fulfill those expectations?

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, except everybody is also crazy. So. (laughs) So yeah. There is a lot of other drama that go -- I definitely felt a different kind of acceptance there in that the people were just all on their own trip in their heads, and there was definitely like -- I was not the weirdest person there by a long shot so. (laughs) Or the biggest character. Like, I was among the people who were like most unique in the yearbook or something like that. I forget what -- we voted on stuff like that and --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Your high school yearbook?

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, my high school yearbook. I was -- anyway, one of those. And college was not -- no. (laughs) Nothing.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Lost that status.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, pretty quickly. (laughs) Pretty quickly.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: It's funny that you said that about art school because I felt -- I think I felt very accepted at Woodward Park. It was like people were very accepting of everyone, and it was a pretty diverse school. And then when I went to Poly Prep for three years, it was kind of -- you were -- it was very Italian, very like -- people were like very -- had like more money than my family had. And so, there was like a lot of status stuff going on and I didn't fit in. It was a, you know, a prep school and so I think the combination of it being like a lot less diverse and also a lot richer than Woodward Park meant that I all of a sudden didn't fit it anymore. And it was really probably the worst years of like -- I mean, I think like seventh and eighth and ninth grade are pretty terrible years for a lot of people (laughs) probably, but I think those were the worst years I had, where I really felt like I didn't fit in at all, and was made fun of a lot, like -- I was like pretty bullied, and people would make fun of me for being Indian.

NEELA MILLER: Wow.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Like I remember in art class, it was like -- I sat down and -- at like a table and there was like -- there was only like one table left or chair left and I sat down there. And like the popular kids were there? And they just had to sit there, and like this like one popular kid was like, "Something smells bad!" And like everyone laughed and I like didn't get it. And they're, "Smells like Indian food here all of a sudden."



NEELA MILLER: Oh my God.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: (laughs) As if I someone --

NEELA MILLER: Yeah. (laughs)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Like I smell bad like Indian food all the time?

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: And I like that like really stands out to me as like, yeah, I was like very like made fun of. And the other -- and I was also made fun of -- the popular girls used to always make fun of my shoes because they weren't fancy enough, because there was like a dress code and my family at that point still didn't have very much money and, in the switch from Woodward Park to Poly Prep, like the tuition went up and so money was even more scarce. [00:30:00] Woodward Park I think like let me and Hans go pretty much for free, and then Poly Prep like cha -- didn't -- we had to start paying them more money. Anyway, so I remember I had shoes from Payless, and they made fun of my shoes being from Payless.

NEELA MILLER: Wow.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: I was like a poor kid with like shoes from Payless, and like I didn't have a new field hockey stick. I used one of the old field hockey sticks, and just all these ways that I like just did not fit in at all.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: And I was like so happy to get out of there and go to LaGuardia partially because I was like this is an art school and everyone is here because they like tested into the school for having some sort of ability or talent, and that makes

them all different in a way. And so everyone's different, and so there's like not going to be -- and that was pretty much true. There wasn't any of that shit.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Like we look back at LaGuardia, like me and my high school friends who, you know, I'm still very close with, so my best friends in a lot of ways, and we're like, "Yeah, there weren't any cliques!" People had like their groups of friends, but there were no popular kids.

NEELA MILLER: Right.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: You know? Like people just like had their friends, but everyone just did their thing. You know?

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Everyone was really accepting of everyone else. Mostly because no one cared.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, yeah. (laughs)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Because they were just doing their thing.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, and in an average -- or in an average high school, there's like the art kids over there who are just like general --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Which I was becoming at Poly Prep, one of the art kids. Like spent a lot of time in the art studio after, you know. But Poly Prep also made you play three sports a year, so you like couldn't get out of being a --

NEELA MILLER: A jock? (laughs)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Everyone had to -- and I was just bad at sports.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, yeah. I can't imagine what would happen to me. (laughs) Oh. I was -- when you talked about the lunch thing, I remembered how -- so we were vegetarian growing up, and kids used to ask me about like what I was eating for lunch and like, "That looks weird!" And I was like pretty militant vegetarian at a young age (laughs) and I would make fun of the other kids for what they were eating because I thought it was disgusting, and I was like, "Do you know" and would ask my dad about like what is bologna and stuff. And my dad would happily tell me what bologna was (laughs) and like -- and I was like, "Do you know that's like parts, pig parts or whatever?" And I'd make animal noises while they were eating their sandwiches. And my mother definitely received angry phone calls from parents whose children wanted to not eat meat anymore. Yeah. (laughs)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: That's pretty amazing.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, especially my -- Julie, who's one of my childhood best friends, who is Filipino. They like only eat meat, and her mom was like, "What am I supposed to do? (laughs) This does not make sense to me. Please stop!" Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: I remember at Shire Village we once made our entire bunk vegetarian. I don't know if we were in the same bunk at that time.

NEELA MILLER: I don't -- I don't remember

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Sometimes we were and sometimes we weren't, right?

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: But I remember one year making my entire bunk vegetarian and them all having to go home being like, "We're vegetarian now."

NEELA MILLER: (laughs) Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: And the parents were like, “Oh, he went to summer camp and came back vegetarian.” Like my 11-year-old, you know? Like.

NEELA MILLER: (laughs) Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: “What am I supposed to do?”

NEELA MILLER: Fortunately, Shire Village was accommodating enough to --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah. I don’t remember ever having problems.

NEELA MILLER: No, me neither really. Yeah. I was -- like I was the only vegetarian kid in my school, and there was a trip, sixth grade, where it was like an overnight trip and it was this big thing and we would all go to the woods, Stokes Forest in New Jersey, and it was like a few days long. And I had to ask for special meals, and so they cooked me this special thing and it was always way better than everybody else’s (laughs) food. And everybody would be eyeing my plate. (laughs) Pretty funny. After having to feel so bizarre also. It’s like I need special food. (laughs)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah.

NEELA MILLER: I forget about that stuff sometimes, being older, how it is to be in school and be like the only vegetarian kid and like have to ask [00:35:00] for food. But it just happens so rarely now.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: It was really one of the things that made me different at Poly Prep, too, was because everyone ate the lunches there at the school and you kind of had to. It was like part of like the tuition or something, and there was no vegetarian main entree in ever. And so my parents like got to like opt out of it, and I got to bring my own lunch (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

NEELA MILLER: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: I was the only one with my own lunch.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Me and my brother, and like everyone knew that like we didn't eat the food there.

NEELA MILLER: Wow.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Everyone else ate the school lunch and we didn't eat it because like we were different.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, yeah. I can't imagine. How long did Hans go there?

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Hans went there I think for three years. I also went there for three years. Yeah. He had a less terrible time than I did.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Because he went there with a lot of his friends from Woodward Park, like Villary and Daniel.

NEELA MILLER: Oh.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: And they made friends. They fit in better. They weren't like cool or anything, but they like fit in and made friends better than I did. I went there with a few of my friends from Woodward Park, Raven and Francisca; but Raven became popular really quickly, and we stopped being friends in school. We were still friends at summer camp, but we weren't friends at school anymore.

NEELA MILLER: I see.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Because she became cool. And Francisca was really good at sports, so she was still like shy and didn't like make a ton of friends. But because

she was so good at sports and so sporty and I think Poly Prep was really good for her in a lot of ways because Woodward Park was not very sporty, and like you know, I still am friends with her now, and she can't get through a day without like running five miles and like -- like she needs to exercise and needs to do --

NEELA MILLER: Something strenuous.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah, she needs to every day. Like she gets really high strung otherwise. I think Woodward -- Poly Prep was really good for her because she like figured out how to actually manage herself better because she was like doing a lot of exercise and she was really good at any sport she did. So even if she wasn't like super popular, everyone liked her because --

NEELA MILLER: She was on the team?

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah, she was on the volleyball team and she was on the softball team, and we played different sports and so much of it was like defined by sports that we were still friends, but she definitely had like other friends. I kind of ended up -- and it was the three of us, we were really close in Woodward Park, and I kind of ended up without either of them and kind of by myself. So.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: But Hans did better, like him and Peter and Villary. And like, you know, me and Raven and Francisca were never as close as we'd been before Woodward Park. I mean before Poly Prep. But Hans got closer with like Villary and Daniel and those people at Poly Prep. They're still all his best friends. (laughs)

NEELA MILLER: I see.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Anyway. Funny. So we were talking about college, when you moved back to Brooklyn.

NEELA MILLER: When I moved back to Brooklyn meaning?

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Well, you were born in Brooklyn.

NEELA MILLER: Yes.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: So in my mind you moved back to Brooklyn from --

NEELA MILLER: Yes. (laughs)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: -- from your (laughs) hiatus in New Jersey.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah. Yeah. Yes, I've gone back and forth to Brooklyn a couple times, yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: It's true.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, and I think Brooklyn is a place that is overall -- I mean, I never experienced Manhattan as a melting pot. Manhattan to me was always a place for mostly white people, so now -- and yeah, Brooklyn felt like a place where I was like other people I guess and a place where I was kind of -- fit in as much as one could because of the melting pot. And yeah. Yeah. Brooklyn feels a lot like home to me always, just very -- a much more comfortable place than a lot of places.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: What do you think the reasons for that are?

NEELA MILLER: Well like I was just saying, that it feels comfortable and [00:40:00] I've spent enough time there that I know the lay of the land, and I feel like I can get around on instinct versus needing to get directions per se (laughs) which has happened many times. I just -- and I think that I can get around anywhere on instinct, but it doesn't work that way.

(laughs) It's like yeah, I kind of -- I know where the streets are, don't I? No. San Francisco is just -- just a mess. (laughs) But yeah, so it's just -- and I associate it with family always, that that's where we would go to be with family. And family was, of course, people who I was most similar to and it always felt like comfortable in that way.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: What was it like going to college in Brooklyn?

NEELA MILLER: Well, yeah, it felt like just being home more than -- it was -- like I was close enough to my parents and close -- closer to family, you guys, uncles, aunt, grandmother, but it -- it felt like I was still home but also independent and felt more like I fit in somewhere, (inaudible) -- and art school was rough but like (laughs) just rough and just because college, I think, the formative stuff that happens when you're in college, at least what happened for me was like a lot of struggle. And -- but it was a good place for me always. It always felt like a good place, but maybe mostly just because like I felt like I fit. My attitude fit, my background fit, and -- but at some point, it became like ah, it's stressing me out! (laughs) New York is stressing me out. Hence, I left. Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: You think you left because -- because art school was rough?

NEELA MILLER: I was just a -- and to this day, ten years later, I'm still finding myself; and New York felt more and more inhospitable to that. So hard to make a living, so hard for me to like find a job that I could just survive on and also like I just always felt -- maybe it's family pressure also, like pressure to like do something and like -- it was like ah, I don't know! (laughs) I have no clue, and I needed to go somewhere else to figure out what -- all I could be. Yeah, at the same time as New York feels like home, home is also so weighted, and I think that's true for anybody that is -- like even for our parents, maybe



India is home but it's also like well, there's all this other stuff that goes along with home that's like too much history and kind of old patterns that get brought up that like are like "I don't want to do this again. Why am I 16 years old again? Stop it!" (laughs) So. Yeah, it's a complicated place for me that I love dearly and it's like definitely in my heart. It's like where I'm from, but not where I can really be. And yeah, maybe that is similar to our parents, so like yeah, they're from -- my mother would say she's from India but she's lived in New Jersey for 20 plus years, and so.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Right. Well, they'll never not be from India.

NEELA MILLER: Right, whereas like -- yeah, and that's why -- I mean when people -- I don't even think people ask me that question anymore: "Where are you from?" I mean, they do I guess, and they're like -- "Oh, I grew up in New Jersey" and like, [00:45:00] "No, but" (laughs) that whole debacle, you know, where -- why are you brown? (laughs) So, is that what the question is? Yeah. Yes, I can answer that.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: How do you usually answer them?

NEELA MILLER: I say, "My mother's from India and my father is from Indiana" which is the joke (laughs) of my life that I didn't realize until I went to college because, like I was saying, that nobody in -- growing up, asked me where I was from or anything. And then I started saying that in college, and I was like, "India and Indiana? No! Why?" (laughs) Why? (laughs)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: It's funny.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah. I just have to go along with that. Sometimes I say, "My dad is from the Midwest" just to subvert that whole (laughs) -- the whole joke.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Do people ever have follow-up questions?

NEELA MILLER: Follow-up questions?

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Well, what do -- how do they respond?

NEELA MILLER: Oh, lots of times, "That's why you're so beautiful." That's (laughs). Like OK, bonus. (laughs) Bonus. So. There is one time when I was at [Odiyan] and there was a visiting -- I don't know if he's considered a Lama but anyway it's like some visiting spiritual leader; and I wasn't really supposed to run into this man, but it -- I did and he like -- he didn't speak English, but somebody translated and he asked me where I was from or something. And I said that my mother is from India and my father is from -- and he said, "Oh, she's mixed. That's why she's so beautiful." It was the only thing this man said to me. (laughs) All right. Well, thank you. And I'll? continue my work day. (laughs) What was I talking about? Oh, follow-up questions. Usually, that -- it starts a conversation or like well -- I then ask, "Where are you from?" and like "What is your family background?" or like you're from -- or your parents are Italian and then we talk about different family backgrounds and stuff, because I'm very interested in where other people are from -- like their parents' histories and who -- like immigrant families and how connected they are to that history, because it's so important to my mother and the rest of our family, and to hear different levels of interest and different levels of like wanting to actually hide where they're from, stuff like that.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: So you ask people back where are you from.

NEELA MILLER: Mm-hmm.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: How do they -- do they usually respond like, "Oh, well I'm from you know Nebraska?" Or do they usually say, "Well, my parents are Italian." Like how do people respond to that?

NEELA MILLER: It depends a lot where the people are from because like somebody from Nebraska most often would say (laughs) "I'm from Nebraska." Or like people -- but even -- so living in Ohio for a year and a half, most people didn't ask me either. They just -- I don't know if they just didn't think about it or like maybe they had heard beforehand because people like -- it was the kind of place where, if there's like a group of brown people walking down the street, everybody will look, just to look. I mean, they don't mean anything by it, but it's just like weird because it doesn't exist there, people of different skin colors. Like, "Oh, there's the one black family that lives in town." And they're like, everybody looks! And it's innocent enough. They're not like crazy racist community, but so I feel like maybe there is some of that where they're like, "She's different but I don't know how to engage this." And so just let it go and then ask somebody later (laughs) or something along those lines. Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: What do people make of your name you think?

Neela Miller.

NEELA MILLER: Most people just say, "Oh, that's a pretty name." Nobody asked like what the back -- [00:50:00] what ki -- some people ask, "What kind of name is that?" And I had a guy at the airport, Indian guy at the airport, and he's like "Neela? Do you know what kind -- where's that name from?" Like he was testing me or something. (laughs) Or he might have even asked me like, "What are you?" or something (laughs) ridiculous. So like, "My mom is from India; it's an Indian name." He's like, "You know what it means?" Like I had never thought about what it means. (laughs) Well, I guess I know. Well, he had my full name, Neela Akash, which means blue sky; and he was like, "Oh,

very interesting name!” That’s what he said, interesting, because that’s not something that Indians do really, the whole like first and middle name. So.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah, no it’s not. It’s funny. Now I was just wondering about how people respond when you ask you, “Well, where are you from?” Like because it’s a genuine question for you, right?

NEELA MILLER: Mm-hmm.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: It’s not like a facetious sort of --

NEELA MILLER: Right. Yeah, because I’m genuinely interested in -- I -- I usually -- if somebody asks like, “Oh, I’m from Nebraska?” then I would continue the line of questioning. And I did that a lot with Nathan because his family has been in Ohio and in the States for a couple of generations. And his family, the ones that did emigrate, come from a history of wanting to cover that up. Being Polish immigrants, they were like -- and in that time in the country, it was like they were kind of ashamed of speaking Polish at home. They didn’t want to do that. It wasn’t like, “Oh, we just didn’t think about it.” It was like, we want you to speak proper.”

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Sure.

NEELA MILLER: And changing their name and all that stuff. The only remnants of their family’s histor -- cultural history is like making -- having a passion for pierogies. (laughs) That’s about -- and sauerkraut. That’s where it kind of ends. And doughy cheeks and (laughs) which is something they can’t help but.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Where is your father originally from? Does he know?

NEELA MILLER: There is some mystery on his -- on his father's side. His father and -- you know, makes sense -- my father is fairly mysterious also as a person and not really very whatever, talkative. But his father's family he thought emigrated from Germany. His father passed a while ago, so he -- he had already passed before my father got interested in genealogy; and he had managed to ask his mother a lot of questions about her family, and her family has been in the States since like 1600 something, like a really long time. And that side is like full of all kinds of western European -- English, French, Scotch, Irish, Dutch. It's basically that whole conti -- end of the continent smashed together, aside from I guess Spanish and Portuguese and stuff. But yeah, they -- so there was -- it was so far in the past that I think that he just identified as American always, but maybe because of my mother he got more and more interested in like what is the cultural -- the heritage that I am offering to my kids. That's how I interpreted it, as like see? There is history! (laughs) And like show us the family tree and like how far it goes back, and he tracked his side of the family back to like Mayflower Era and he tried to become part of the Mayflower Society or something, which is some, it turns out, very exclusive group that you have to really prove that you are a direct descendant of somebody who came on the Mayflower. And so that was sort of his attempt at showing his cultural contribution as this is how American you are. This is (laughs) -- and yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: How did your parents meet?

NEELA MILLER: That's a interesti -- that (laughs) is a good question, because they didn't tel -- they always skirted around the question growing up and I actually didn't find out, and they've never [00:55:00] confirmed or denied the story that your mother told me, that they met through an ad in India Abroad Newspaper that my father had placed after -- my

mother is his third wife, and the first two were white American women who he had had children with, and that was always difficult thing for my mom, that he had been previously married. But he had been into Hinduism and followed a guru, and he was a vegetarian and he wanted someone who understood his belief system; and I'm not sure how much of this I'm -- like that I just put the pieces together myself because he has never spoken to me about this, but that he wanted somebody who could like deal with him being vegetarian and into meditation and yoga and belief in reincarnation and karma and all that, which I always think is funny because my mom -- they argue about belief systems constantly. They don't -- they approach it in a totally different way. My dad will explain something. Traditionally, my dad would be the one who would answer spiritual questions, and then my mom would say, "No, it's not like that." (laughs) And then be like -- and then they would fight about it, and then I'd be like, "Hmm, I guess I have to decide for myself." (laughs) But so, he placed this ad and I guess my mom was one of the respondents and, after three months of knowing each other, they got married. And when I learned that, I was like oh, so much sense. (laughs) It made so much more sense because trying to picture my parents -- the story they'd always told me was that they had met with mutual friends in Vermont, which was like who were these friends? (laughs) How did this romance occur? This makes no sense to me. (laughs) My mother swept off her feet and, yeah, that's like -- I don't see these two making this like oh, grand like, "Oh, we've just fallen so madly in love; we're going to get married in three months." Like no, no. This was like, "We would like to both be married. Will you be a suitable partner?" And -- and they came to that decision that "Yes, you will be a suitable partner in this short time." (laughs) Suitable enough anyway. (laughs) And thus, they were married and nine months

later, I arrived. So they didn't really have a whole lot of time of just being the two of them. Kids came pretty quickly thereafter, so them working out their cultural differences has been a thing that I've witnessed (laughs) from a very early age and continue to witness. And -- yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: In what other ways other than spiritual matters do you think they've been working out their cultural differences?

NEELA MILLER: Just general communication, the use of sarcasm specifically because my dad is very sarcastic, or has always been very sarcastic and that's something that my mom has struggled with and I think greatly so. I think sarcasm can be really just like -- just cheap shots, and so anyway, she -- her learning to deal -- how to deal with that and sort of trying to adopt it herself. At this point, she's more or less adopted sarcasm for her own use, which -- but she uses it sort of clumsily and it doesn't work always. And yeah, that's been a main thing for them because I don't know of any really very sarcastic Indians. But I don't know too many Indians either.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah, I don't know. I feel like our family in particular really hates sarcasm for some reason. Like they -- I know with my father, you can't be sarcastic. Like I can't be sarcastic. If he's like you know, "Do this thing!" and I'm like -- say something I don't even know, something sarcastic back like, "You do the thing!" you know, he views it as like very challenging, like -- I get like "Don't" [01:00:00] -- like "Show respect to your elders!" sort of immediately if I'm sarcastic. It's not -- then, and like I can tease him. You know, our family likes teasing each other but not --

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Sarcasm is viewed as like very like, at least for me, talking back or something.

NEELA MILLER: Some kind of attack, which it is I think. Sarcasm is an attack, but it depends on how well you can take it or you can play with it; and that was something I think my mother can't help but be injured by it. And although she's still injured by it, I think she's tried to play it off a little bit.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: I always felt jealous that like your family just like ate Indian food all the time. And my mom knows how to cook some Indian food, and my father knows how to cook some Indian food but you're like -- your mom was like the Indian cook, you know, because after -- besides from Nani, our grandmother, but that you got to grow up with so much of that heritage --

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: -- in a way that I didn't you know?

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, I definitely -- I do feel very fortunate to have grown up on that diet because it was pretty much every day and not on weekends (laughs) perhaps. But yeah, I grew up on daal and that was like a main thing; and I do feel very fortunate because now I can, at times, I go on spells of cooking that I feel like I can at least imitate what happened for what I was given.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Why do you think your parents didn't tell you the like --

NEELA MILLER: How they met?

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Mm-hmm.



NEELA MILLER: They're very secretive people. I -- there's never -- I never felt like there was open communication in our family, and I think that they -- maybe it's rooted in how they met, and they -- I imagine they held a lot of cards close to their chest in that process of getting married. I know that my mom didn't maybe even know about all the kids that my dad had going into the marriage, something along those lines. I -- but ex -- like I don't know these things. (laughs) And that's weird to me because they're my parents and that -- so, that's something that they -- they've always been very clo -- hush-hush about certain types of things in. So as a result, I don't feel terribly like I need to keep them informed of everything (laughs) either, which you know maybe is their loss also. But --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: I didn't realize you didn't know that story. I guess I grew up knowing that's how your parents met.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, nobody -- nobody told me. And I think it's weird also that they would be poten -- maybe ashamed that they met through an ad in the newspaper? Especially to their own children, like why would we make any judgments on that? And also because India has a history of arranged marriage, and that's essentially what that was. So I don't -- yeah, I don't really understand why we should have been kept in the dark about that, because I know when I tol -- I found that out, I was in high school or something. I told my brother. My brother was like, "What?!" He had no idea either. (laughs) And he -- he's always been way more like confrontational and like he -- so he brought it up at some point. I don't know what the conversation was because I was like, "I don't care, I don't want to be involved, I'm going in the other room." (laughs) It's like now I know. Happy? (laughs) It all makes sense now. (laughs) Like thank you. (inaudible), yeah. The truth comes out and then I was like oh, now this relationship is --

(laughs) I understand. But yeah, he -- he was always more, in his own way, a rule breaker, very different than me but been that way.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: How did they -- how did that conversation go? How did they respond?

NEELA MILLER: Oh, I -- I don't know. I ran away. (laughs)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Oh, you don't. OK.

NEELA MILLER: I just plugged my ears and walked away. It's like, "I'm not part of this!"

[01:05:00]

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) OK. As you talk --

NEELA MILLER: I think it was brushed off actually. It was like they just didn't respond entirely. Like, "What are you talking about?" with like weird looks on their face. And like (laughs) OK, God. (laughs) Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: What was their relationship like? What is their relationship like?

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, well they never understood each other I think is the crux of it in general or like in specific conversations. I was translator growing up. I always felt like translator/peace keeper. I was like trying to have them understand each other, and I was like but, OK, this is what she's trying to say and like, because they each individually made sense to me, but when they talked to each other it was like they were talking at each other and nobody was like -- it was like Phsssheewww! Going -- just totally missing. And I was like but it's -- no, it doesn't have to be this ridiculous (laughs) and complicated. It can -- you can try to understand each other, and it was more like just them being stubborn or -- like now, looking back, I feel like they didn't want to understand the other. But it

was like -- more just like a battle of wills almost. It was like, "I get my way and I win, or he gets his way and then he wins, and that is unacceptable!" And it was like oh, and then I was a kid. I just wanted them to like -- but they both have valid points. (laughs) Please listen to each other. No. And that is why communication is the cornerstone of a (laughs) good marriage and yeah, I'm happy that I have that in my own marriage.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Do you think -- why do you think they couldn't understand each other so much?

NEELA MILLER: They're both really poor communicators (laughs) for one, just in a basic way, besides any cultural differences. They're just not people who deal with emotion well, but they also -- yeah, they just communicate in different ways. My mom communicates with a lot of like subtext and so does my dad. (laughs) They're like just -- and the subtext was not getting through on either side, and it was yeah. They'd leave a lot to the imagination which has been a struggle for me also learning how to not communicate. So like, you know what I mean, right? (laughs) Just expecting people to read between the lines enough to understand what I mean by stuff, and --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah. So if we go back to your life history a little bit, you were talking about leaving New York after college.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Because even though New York is home, it's a really stressful place for you.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, and so I went to a Buddhist retreat center after college; and it was kind of, when I look back, kind of like this well, people thin -- when I would tell them about it when I was deciding to do it, a couple of professors were like just like give it

some time; like you don't have to like run off and like sell your -- sell yourself into like some crazy voluntary experience or something that just -- but for me, it was like a no -- there was no other choice at that time. Like I didn't -- it seemed like the best possible situation and -- and it was for a long time, and it immersed me in a whole other culture that I had never thought about and I didn't expect to have that happen. I went there thinking I was going to be there for eight months, which is a -- a long [01:10:00] commitment but not like five years, what I ended up being there for. And yeah, and that has been an interesting addition because I was so involved in Tibetan culture and Tibetan Buddhism and learning about that culture and integrating that into my unders -- spiritual background and my spiritual belief system, because I guess I had kind of considered myself a Hindu sort of, but a lazy Hindu (laughs), like most of our family is kind of. There's no real strong religious impulse except for Ila Maasi, who prays every day but that is not really what we grew up with. But yeah, to become immersed in this spiritual path and to like finally accept it as something that I felt personally interested in. Because for a long time I was like, yeah, I mean it's an interesting study or something like that, that I was like I'm not going to give my heart to this. I don't -- not until I know more or feel more and, over time, that did happen and I felt really connected to it. But then leaving there, I was like well now, where does that all fit in with everything else, specifically like then taking my Buddhism, specifically Vajrayana and Tibetan Buddhism and practicing that in life and mixing it sort of with Hatha Yoga practice, which is because they're -- they're so similar but so different (laughs) at the same time and -- and finding that if I say that I'm Buddhist, it's offensive to my family. Like I said something about it to Ila Maasi and she was like, "You're a Hindu!" Like perhaps (laughs) but by birth or -- and in some

ways through like connection to deities and connection to like family events where we deal with Hinduism, like yeah. Deities mostly because that was our experience, and that's why my mother and my father had such different views on religion because my mother associated religion and stuff more with the praying -- praying to deities, ceremonies, etc. And my father was much more interested in the philosophy and I think that's pretty typical for people who convert versus our people who are raised in a religious tradition. But yeah, and that's an ongoing thing where I feel connected in a way maybe that is more similar to a person who was raised in a religion to the Tibetan tradition because I had this very intimate involvement in religious practices there that I didn't have growing up, and I had spiritual experiences and felt connected to a spiritual leader, which had never happened before, or since, and that is a different kind of connection than just like growing up, seeing pictures of Lakshmi and somebody telling me who -- "Oh, that's Lakshmi, goddess of wealth" and like, "Pray to her." (laughs) Pray to -- OK, I don't know what praying means. (laughs) I'm just going to ask for stuff. (laughs) "Lakshmi, I would like money please." (laughs) And yeah, so yeah, I've been negotiating that because I do -- also I went through yoga teacher training so, and that focused on kind of a [01:15:00] more westernized, to me, it seems more like a westernized version of that because people in the west don't -- in a lot of cases, don't like focusing on the deities and so they would say that yeah, there -- these deity names represent a certain energy and I can -- that's like oh, that seems -- makes more sense to me as something, but I still have this association with a deity as an image of something that even just seeing the picture has a power over your own life and having -- and that's why the art was created, was to imbue your life with these different things when you see them. So if you view Lakshmi, if you imagine

Lakshmi, then you naturally attract more richness into your life or Saraswati, with similar kinds of effects. And so they're all mixed in there together somehow because philosophically, I think I'm much more oriented towards Buddhism, but I don't care much for philosophy anyway. (laughs) Nathan is the philosopher. (laughs) Yeah. He likes to get into these philosophical discussions.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Really?

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Interesting.

NEELA MILLER: Don't get him started please. (laughs) Don't get him started. (laughs)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: OK.

NEELA MILLER: It's endlessly frustrating to me.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: And you met Nathan.

NEELA MILLER: And I met my husband at there, which -- and that's part of why I feel like we're so compatible is because we have a similar spiritual background and that we both -- I mean, he was raised Catholic but he doesn't identify as Catholic at all. If anybody told him he was Catholic, he would throw a fit. (laughs) Nobody's going to tell him that. But yeah, we have the similar belief system and we're oriented towards the same kind of deep inquiry of the mind and understanding our true motivations in situations and trying to live in a way that is like maybe transcends ordinary mind. Trying anyway. Apparently, it involves a lot of watching TV and (laughs) drinking whiskey. Which is not antithetical to many Buddhist masters who have lived before so. (laughs)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: I thought one thing, thinking about this interview, that was interesting was maybe talking to you about like the negotiations and the figuring

out -- and we talked about this before -- of the sort of having a wedding? Because I thought that was interesting, thinking about being mixed and...

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, and what's interesting and that was also that -- so like I really wanted to represent like all of our background altogether, like I really wanted to have it be like -- so it's like a western Hindu Polish (laughs) because Nathan's family is Polish, that's the closest thing to a cultural identity that they have outside of being American, like wanting to have it so all inclusive, like we have represented everybody sort of thing. It is so difficult to negotiate like, also because rituals are so important to me and the symbolism of rituals and I needed the rituals to be rooted in history and the Hindu marriage ritual is like who knows how long they've been practicing weddings this way and that was so important to me, and having it be a physical ritual and not just like a lot of modern Christian weddings. It's just -- it's a lot of words and, to me, I needed it to feel like this alchemical process where we -- how we did -- you put a little bit of this -- I didn't know what half of anything was. He's like OK, throw that in the fire, throw this in the fire, it represents [01:20:00] something, this in the fire, it represents something, and -- and you walk around and it does something and just feeling like that was so important to me, to have that represented, but I didn't -- it was like I can't water this down or like add something else to it. I don't have that kind of authority. And so in the end, we ended up having a Hindu ceremony with also a prior quiet confidential wedding, just the two of us, which was all words (laughs), which was all just -- when we had our -- we had our private wedding in Carmel, just the two of us, and a -- I guess he's a minister or something, and he just -- it was all language. There was almost no -- there's a little gesture, hands -- hand holding, kisses, but (laughs) it was very sweet and beautiful. And that was really what he

wanted. Nathan had no real interest in what the like -- the rituals and stuff. He just wanted to be married and be done with it. And for him to have it be just the two of us was actually all that he wanted. So he was really happy with that ceremony and I left feeling like, no, I'm sure that I want another wedding. (laughs) I was like I need all those rituals, I need the feeling of having everybody around and the yeah, I needed all that other stuff. And in the end, he was happy about that too but I know that he felt very strongly -- and it was a beautiful ceremony for sure, but I know that -- I knew that I needed all these other things. It's just so complicated to put it all in one. So hard to make everybody happy, even when it's just two people. (laughs) Weddings are so tough though. That's the general moral of that story (laugh) is that it's so hard to -- it's so weighted and without just like one tradition, to be like yes, we're both Catholic, let's go have a Catholic wedding. Then it would be like OK, wipe our hands of that one and we can plan on our centerpieces. (laughs) Be interested in that but -- and even Christian/Jewish couples, I feel like they have it easier because the traditions are similar enough where they can have multi-faith ceremony. The rabbi will stand next to the priest. They'll do something together, whereas like -- and I had thought about that. I was like maybe we can put a Catholic thing in there to make your mom happy. Nathan was like, "No. No Catholic thing." (laughs) So that was -- in the end, it all went off well I think. My dad -- it just more or less didn't happen that way, also because I think he would have used it as an excuse to just not have the wedding. And I was like, no, I'm getting my way on this one even if it includes dishonesty. (laughs) And I think actually he was maybe the most happy I've ever seen him, at my wedding. He seemed like just so genuinely enjoying himself and like felt like it was a really good thing and, like wow, who are you? (laughs) I felt



really disoriented by how excited he seemed and genuinely proud of me. It was like whoa, this makes me uncomfortable. (laughs)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: (laughs) It's funny.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah. (laughs) So, yeah. The wedding was quite a debacle, but it also felt important to me to try to meld our different backgrounds in some way because it felt like the first step going forward in our fam-- building our family. Like how are we going to structure holidays, [01:25:00] occasions worthy of celebration. Like how Indian are we going forward? Like I definitely don't want to have my kids not celebrate Indian holidays. Like they -- they should have that in their -- at least in their knowledge, and there's nothing -- I don't see any reason why not to. I just got to learn (laughs) -- I have to learn about them enough to initiate so we'll see how that goes. Ila Maasi actually said she was going to send me a book. She had found a book that had all the different days of the Indian calendar and that they -- and explained what it means. And it was like yeah! I want that! (laughs) Because she sends us those calendars every year, and I can see there's all these days of significance, like every day has some significance. I'd like to know something about why, what is it about.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

NEELA MILLER: So yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: I agree. I feel like I look at that calendar and have no idea.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah. It's like I'm sure this has significance but no, I can't call Ila Maasi every day and find out so. (laughs)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Though she may not mind.

NEELA MILLER: (laughs) Yeah. No. (laughs) But yeah, that would be really nice, although funny to learn from a book versus family. But plenty of stuff I ask my mom and she's like, "I don't know, ask Ila Maasi." (laughs)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah. I mean, I think -- same with my father. I think British boarding school.

NEELA MILLER: Right, or Catholic school --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: For your mother, yeah.

NEELA MILLER: -- in my mom's case, yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: To really disconnect with them from some of that. I think.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah. No, it seems likely, although they would -- I think they would celebrate that stuff anyhow.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah, yeah, because they didn't seem to know how to transmit that to us.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, well they couldn't get it together to celebrate all the holidays in the first place. That was always the challenge, was like -- and I always liked it when we did. I was never like, "Oh, celebrating Rakhi, really? God!" (laughs) I always wanted to.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah. Yeah.

NEELA MILLER: I was always like kind of disappointed if we didn't do it. I felt like that was something fun that we did.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah, we always enjoyed it as kids, and we -- because we all got to hang out together.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Which was fun.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: And everyone would you know be loud, and there'd be lots of good food, and we all got to hang out and play card games or something on the floor.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, yeah. I -- that was another part about doing the wedding planning that I like -- I -- I was talking to my dad about it, and the -- the whole process of getting like people to figure out where they were going and if they were coming and stuff, and it was like I just wanted it to be -- I was telling my dad that I just wanted it to be a nice time, like we will all get together and have like a joyous occasion in the family. I feel like we've -- all of our family gatherings lately have been for like sad or in times of sadness for a long time. And it was like we should have a joyous occasion. My dad was like, "Where have you been the last 30 years?" (laughs) That like no, that's just not how this family works. Like nothing is fun basically is what he was saying. It's like (laughs) that was my childhood? And it was fun. So take that! (laughs)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah. I think we were maybe cut off from a lot of the drama that happened in -- at those occa -- on those occasions --

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, because we were having our own --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah, and I think a lot of drama happened in Hindi, too. You know, my father getting mad at Ila Bua, or your mother (inaudible) -- I mean, and I'm just making things up. I don't know at all what happened.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: But I think as I got older, I sometimes knew that people were in fights or something, you know. I didn't really know what they were about and -- but I mean, this year at Christmas, we had -- I mean, everyone was like laughing a lot, you know?

NEELA MILLER: No. I think it i -- I think it is fun. I think my dad is just a downer so (laughs) it's not -- and I think it's been hard for him because he's maybe always felt like he doesn't fit in and with having pretty much all Indian family is like hard, but he definitely put himself in that position [01:30:00] because he didn't keep in touch with his friends or his family so. And maybe that's why he enjoyed my wedding so much because his brother and his brother's wife were there, and they got to hang and he felt -- and his daughter, his other daughter was there. So.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah.

NEELA MILLER: And he had people that were like him around, and yeah. It was a very un-Indian crowd for an Indian wedding (laughs) which I kind of liked. I -- the thing that I wish was recorded that was not recorded was Nathan's family entering in like a kind of Indian way. Like they -- I don't know if you saw it, but the yeah. They came in like in a danc-ey parade and everybody said it was so fun and everything, and I didn't see it. And nobody taped it or anything. (laughs) There's not even one photo of it. It's very disappointing. I haven't seen even one photo.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: I think I might have a photo or two.

NEELA MILLER: You might?

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah. I'll look.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: I think what happened was the wedding started and no one really knew it was starting, and so no one was like totally ready. And I think there was also like -- we were starting because the priest wanted to start, but you also like weren't there yet.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: And I was like "Oh, God! (laughs) Neela's not here!" And so there was like some stress about that and like some people weren't totally paying attention to what was happening either. And it was also very short. It was just a few minutes. It wasn't like a lot. It was like literally two to about four minutes. So.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah. Well, it seemed like a really nice thing and I just love the -- like people are not Indian taking part in this very Indian tradition and just going for it, and the things -- I was like this is -- that would have been a great thing for a wedding website (laughs) like one of those wedding blogs. (laughs) It's like it can happen even if you don't -- like that's something -- it was like oh, we don't have any like Indian people that I would invite other than our family. And even if I had done it in New York, it's like yes, we would have had more Indians but it certainly wouldn't have been like all Indians everywhere. It's like just not how our family rolls, so they -- yeah, still would have been a high percentage of other ethnicities and yeah so.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: What do you imagine for, you know, having a family?

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, it's a tricky thing because, you know, you're not going to like this but Nathan gets very touchy about Indian stuff. Like it's kind of a funny thing, like me trying to do stuff that is Indian? He like gets like resistant almost, that I'm -- like him --

he won't like that I'm saying this either (laughs) but like I think it's actually like a power thing between us where like, if I do Indian stuff, then I'm like kind of I don't know, I'm like trying to get my way or something. I don't know. Either way, I -- I'm definitely going to try and have some -- like I'd like to serve my children Indian food every night. Like I'm definitely going to raise them vegetarian, like no question about that. And I am concerned about sending my vegetarian kids to their grandparents' house in Ohio where everybody kills stuff all the time. (laughs) They kill things and eat them. Yes, which I respect but I just don't want that for my children. And also celebration of holidays for sure. I wish that I could give them Hindi, but I don't have that to offer. I wish that I could say like, and maybe this is a possibility somewhere, like send them to a Hindi school because I do think that growing up around another language was so -- it's like this key part of my makeup where like hearing [01:35:00] Hindi has this effect on my being. Like I feel -- and this is my spiritual association. Like it grounds me in this way that like it feels like who I am in some sense and also just like -- who I am and also like oh, I am other at the same time. Like I know you people around me can't understand what these people are saying, but I can so (laughs) it's like a secret super power. (laughs) And sometimes I don't understand them prop -- understand people properly and then I feel dumb (laughs) and it's like oh, I'm not as super powered as I thought. (laughs) But yeah, I w -- maybe any other language but I think about having more of a relationship with Hindi and the -- even traveling to India regularly. Like maybe that's a thing that I do with my kids because I can't offer them as much of the culture as I would want them to have. But like there's a woman at the farmer's market who's half Indian, and her kids are a quarter Indian; and I was showing her pictures of my wedding, and she's always rubbing it in her

kids' face that I'm part Indian. And all of a sudden, she's like, "Morgan!" Her son's name is Morgan. "Morgan, look." He's like, "Yes, I know, she's Indian. OK. OK." (laughs) Yeah, that is probably what I'm going to be like. (laughs) "Listen to me! You are Indian and you will learn stuff about Indian stuff." So.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Do you think Nathan will still be resistant?

NEELA MILLER: Probably. I mean, he's into In -- he loves India. He traveled to India and he loved Indian culture and so at least he's not resistant in that way. Like, he -- he could hang -- go on -- traveling to India regularly. I think he'd be into that, and yeah, it's not like he dislikes that stuff. I think what we've talked about in the past is that like he interprets my wanting to do stuff the Indian way -- and this came up mostly because of the wedding -- was that he thinks I'm just trying to please my mom and like yeah, that might be part of the equation, but it is also important to me in feeling like myself. And the Indian things that I do are part of me feeling whole and -- like if I go a long time without eating anything Indian spiced, I feel weird. I feel better if I have Indian food. That's like just something in my body chemistry then.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: There's also nothing inherently wrong with wanting to make your mother happy.

NEELA MILLER: Right, but he has a hard time with that. He will do everything in his power to not do stuff because somebody guilt-tripped him into it, and he sees a lot of guilt in our family and he hates guilt trips. Hates guilt trips so he will do the opposite just because somebody tried to guilt him into it.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: I feel like what -- a lot of the like guilt and stuff in our family happens for sure. I often do things just to make my father happy, not because

he's going to guilt me about it, which he might or not, but because I think there is a part of me that does believe in the like respect for your elders stuff. Or it's like OK, this thing is ridiculous and it's just to make my father happy, but like I do respect him being my father and being older than me and having certain requests that aren't really -- it's not up to me to question those, so I'm doing this thing.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: (laughs) You know?

NEELA MILLER: Yeah. You know, that resonates for me, too because I definitely -- and that's something that has been difficult to negotiate between Nathan and I also, is the respect for elders because he really didn't grow up with that at all. And for me, it's really important. It's just like -- maybe it was just drilled into me [01:40:00] but I feel like it's the right thing to do and just -- people have more years than you and that's just how you treat people.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah, and you have like, I think with our parents or you know, Ila Bua feel this way about too and that you have a -- there's an obligation I have to them for -- for you know -- for everything in some ways.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: I don't feel guilty. Like it's not a guilt thing. My mother guilts me, right? Like "I raised you and" this and that. Like that's guilt, but like I do have an obligation to the fact that like, you know, these people were like there for me and they still are there for me.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.



MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: You know? But I think there is a -- definitely like an Indian sort of like respect, obligation, you fulfill your role, that sort of stuff that like --

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: -- you have deep down, you know? So like pleasing my father isn't just like making my father happy. It's like fulfilling all these like expectations and yeah.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, and that's I guess also part of that, is that it's not -- it's not just pleasing my mother but pleasing the part of me that feels like I, yeah, that I have obligations to meet or like that they -- I don't know. Yeah, the idea of owing or something is hard, but the -- like if you love somebody and you want them to be happy --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah.

NEELA MILLER: and things that you can -- that are within your power to do even if they seem silly or (laughs) totally reasonable (laughs) and -- and yeah. This is why, talking to Nathan about philosophy can be so frustrating because he's very like cut and dry and like a little bit rough on the edges where it comes to like family and -- and just people in general is where he verges on the side of sociopath, but it's only in speech, not in action. (laughs) You know? Because we talk about things and he's like well, you know, and like grand scheme, ultimate scheme of things, there is like these relationships don't matter or that like these are just people, that you happen to be born into this family and these people are just people, and you don't necessarily have anything in common with or anything like that. And I just can't -- it's like yes, maybe that's true ultimately, but in this plane (laughs) of existence, and fortunately, he doesn't really act that way so. Is this noise getting problematic? (laughs)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: It's OK. Yeah, it's fine. Think it's a lawnmower?

NEELA MILLER: I feel like it's a chipper or a paint sprayer? Could be a paint sprayer that's very loud.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: They're doing a lot of different house repairs on either side of your (inaudible)

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, this is what is happening in Alameda. There is a lot of renovations of these adorable houses.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Oh. That's what's going on.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah. (laughs)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: It's getting spiffed up around here?

NEELA MILLER: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Interesting.

NEELA MILLER: Mm-hmm, because there are all these cute old homes and it's so close to San Francisco. It's -- yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Is there a ferry?

NEELA MILLER: There is ferry, but it only goes to the Embarcadero, so it's not convenient for me; but if I worked in downtown San Francisco, I would totally. It's really nice. It's a very nice ferry. There's a bar. There's (laughs) -- I need to pee.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: OK, I'll pause for a second.

NEELA MILLER: It's back on?

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: We were talking about family obligations and, connected to that, what you imagine for your family. And one thing I wanted to ask you was how you imagine your children negotiating a mixed identity.

NEELA MILLER: I'm a little worried that they won't have a mixed identity actually and that then I become the odd one out, that like -- and I'm sort of shoving it down their throats that they are mixed and that they're (laughs) like "We're pretty much just right." So -- and we're like, "But there's still -- you have more" like there's stuff that -- and because I think that it's offered me this feeling of richness in my own life, this feeling of deep heritage and like coming from a family, like we're Rajputs, we have this like [01:45:00] -- well, royal history, and I feel that in myself, like that I was taught to be in a certain way, like no, I didn't grow up in a palace and with like those kinds of expectations, but my mother definitely tried like -- I don't know if it's genetic maybe also, but like there's certain mannerisms and like wanting to be a certain kind of proper and like stuff like that, that maybe is like just inherently passed down. Nathan could not be anymore different than that like (laughs), seriously. He is a country boy, no consideration of being proper or anything; and so I worry about that a lot (laughs) actually because that's really important to me, and I can see some conflict there because like that's the last thing that he cares about, being proper. But yeah, and actually, I think that that whole Rajput thing is actually very important as far as an identity because, like we talked about earlier, I think that is even more important to them as an identity than just being Indian. It's like this very specific group and specific sort of way of being that and history -- history of having the status and then losing it basically and -- but still feeling like this impor -- the importance of being -- at least acting like you're somebody. (laughs) And so I guess I have a little bit of that and I would want my kids to feel that, too, somehow. As much as I would want them to have some understanding of Hinduism and also some language associations and -- yeah, I definitely am worried that maybe they won't care at all and that I'll be like the one

-- and they'll be like, "Whatever! We're just kids!" Like "You don't know anything anyway! Shut up, Mom!" (laughs) Like because I can imagine these arguments, being like, "What do you know? You're making this stuff up." (laughs) Like "Yes, that's true, but we're going to try." And -- and that is something also why I feel a little more like -- I'm like on the verge of ready to try and have kids and something that makes me feel like I want to hurry up is because our parents are older and like I want them to be around. I don't want them to be so old that like -- and far away that there's no chance of them really getting to know that side. So I don't know.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Do you think you will give them Indian names?

NEELA MILLER: Yes, although we haven't exactly talked about that (laughs) -- I say it with authority and -- but it's important to me. Yeah, that in itself is probably -- would help them to identify at least in some part as Indian.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah, it's interesting because it's that sort of -- the you know -- the -- these parts of your identity, like how people identify you from the outside, right? Based on what you look like? And then these like markers like your name or like where you're from or what kind of church or spiritual center you go to, right? Yeah, so.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, that's like the minimum of what I can give them is a name. I can't imagine having a kid named John or (laughs) Danielle. (laughs) Like it's just not -- not going to happen so, or even Nathan. You know? Or Junior. (laughs)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: One thing I usually ask people, which I haven't asked you yet, is when -- so when people do ask you like how -- what are you but besides from that question, how would you -- how do you identify?

NEELA MILLER: Oh, I never really have one word response because it has always felt complicated. I say that -- I tell them where my parents -- what my parents' background is, and I sometimes say -- I'll say, "My mother grew up in India, and my dad is from Indiana." And they'll say, "Oh, well what's your dad?" And I'll say, "A European blend" (laughs) and yeah, and that's as close as any one identifier (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Do you -- but I guess more, not when you're just having to tell people, but how do you personally?

NEELA MILLER: I identify as mixed.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: As mixed, OK.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, and -- and that's -- yeah, because even if I -- like I can't go one way or another way. I just feel like and I think well, I'm pretty Indian. Like, no you're not (laughs) -- also very like you couldn't be a white girl. I really wanted to play that up, I could play that up but it's not -- I don't know. It's very unclear.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Has that been constant, like through your life? Is that like a term you used or?

NEELA MILLER: I used to say mutt. Used to say I'm a mutt, and I kind of like that. I always thought it was cute. (laughs) But I never -- I -- I never felt like I was just Indian or ever felt like oh, I'm not anything, I'm just -- and a lot of the time growing up it was sort of like a non-issue --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Right.

NEELA MILLER: -- so I just didn't think about it. It was just like, yeah, I'm a child (laughs). Nobody asked me so. And then now, I guess I'm fortunate. I didn't really think about

being different, aside from the vegetarian thing, which I didn't associate with being Indian, and now I realize how Indian that is. How specifically Indian.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah?

NEELA MILLER: Because other cultures just don't -- don't do that.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: No. Yeah, they say vegetarianism as a cultural thing is pretty, very South Asian. So. OK. Was there anything else you feel like we didn't get to that you want to make sure and say?

NEELA MILLER: No. I thought I thought of something just before we started again and then I forgot it. No. (laughs) I think that's it.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: OK, you sure?

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, yeah. [01:55:00] I can't think of what it was, what I was thinking about.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: OK. Well, let me know if you think of it. (laughs) I'm around. I just want to say on tape thank you for doing this interview.

NEELA MILLER: Yeah, thank you.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: It's great to get to sit and talk to you for a few hours.

NEELA MILLER: You too.

END OF AUDIO FILE