

Interviewee: Catherine Isabelle Rajwani
Interviewers: Chelsea Richard, Nabile Tueme,
AnnMarie Walters
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Abstract: Catherine Rajwani was born in Worcester in 1973. She attended Notre Dame and Columbia University and then law school. She and her husband currently works as lawyers in her mother's law firm. In this oral history she discusses her parents and siblings, living in different parts of the country, and her travels outside the country. She explains her view on the importance of work-life balance and also her volunteer work with the Salvation Army and in a soup kitchen.

AW: OK. Your full name, maiden name, married name.

CIR: (Laughs) My current name, full name, is Catherine Isabelle Rajwani, and my maiden name was Casey, so it was Catherine Casey, or as they used to call me Caty Casey (laughs).

AW: Ok. When were you born?

CIR: I was born on May 19, 1973.

CR: And where were you born?

CIR: In Worcester.

CR: Worcester?

CIR: Mhmm.

CR: All right. Have you lived here all your life?

CIR: No (laughs). When I was little, my dad was in the army so we lived in North Carolina, Pennsylvania for a few years, and then I went to college in New York City and moved to Pennsylvania and then to California and then to Texas for law school, so I just came back to the area about three years ago.

CR: What college did you go to?

CIR: I went to Columbia.

CR: Columbia?

CIR: Yeah.

[Long pause]

CIR: I studied...do you want me to...I studied chemical (laughs) I can help you out if you want. I'd be---I'm more than happy if you want to ask questions but I can talk forever so...

CR: Ok, good.

CIR: It's one of the, you know, job requirements of being an attorney. I went to—so—I...lets see. I went to grade school in Shrewsbury (Massachusetts), that's actually where I lived, and I was there for kindergarten then went to a school in North Carolina for first grade, I was in Pennsylvania for second and third, came back and went to an elementary school for fourth, middle school for fifth. By the time I think I was in high school I had been in eight different schools.

All: Wow!

CIR: Cause I went, yeah, to, you know the middle school, then the high school and then actually I went to Notre Dame for four years, graduated and went to Columbia to study engineering...my undergrad degree's in chemical engineering ...so I was there for four years, and then after graduating in 1995, I worked for Industrial Gas and a chemical company called Air Products and Chemicals, and that was---they were headquartered in Pennsylvania, and I worked for them for about three and a half years before going to law school and I worked for them in Pennsylvania and then also out in the Silicon Valley, out in California, and I lived in Palo Alto (California) when I was out there...

CR: Oh wow, you've been everywhere!

CIR: Yeah, yeah, it's kind of funny I think that I'm back because I grew up and I always wanted to leave and then once I had kids I was like, "Oh, actually it would be nice to get back, it's a nice place to, to you know, raise a family." So, yeah so I was out in Palo Alto and then I went to law school down in Texas. I went to Baylor down there, met my husband on the first day of law school, graduated, I clerked for a judge in Dallas for a federal court judge, and then I worked at a really large law firm in Dallas (Texas) for about...I guess I was with them for about five or six years before I had the twins---So I have twins that are three and a half...boy-girl twins.

CR: What's their names?

CIR: Sam and Lucy.

CIR: They're...definitely the highlight of my and my husband's lives (laughs). They're a lot of fun.

AW: Can you tell us a little bit about your parents?

CIR: Sure!

AW: Or tell us about your parents.

CIR: Yeah. My parents are actually both from the area as well. They both grew up for the most part I think in Shrewsbury (Massachusetts), my dad a little bit in Worcester (Massachusetts). My father's, his name's Michael Casey and he is a dentist in West Boylston (Massachusetts). He went to Saint John's [High School], as did all my uncles (laughs), and he then went to [College of the] Holy Cross, and then joined the army for a little while to kind of do like a residency in dentistry, and then moved back to the area and he's in West Boylston (Massachusetts). My mother is Mary Casey, and she is actually the managing partner at our law firm (laughs) so when my husband and I after we had the twins and we moved back, we joined her firm so we could kind of have a better, kind of pace of life, you know, more flexible work schedule with the kids.

AW: So your husband is a lawyer too?

CIR: He is, yeah, and my mom is, and my parents are divorced, they're not together.

CR: And what's your husband's name?

CIR: I'll spell it (laughs). It's S-H-E-H-Z-A-D.

NT: How do you say that?

CIR: Shehzad. It's just like it's spelled, but it's kind of, you know if you hear Shehzad since it's a different name, people sometimes are like _____?

AW: What's his background?

CR: Where's he from?

CIR: He, lets see. He was born in what is now Bangledash. When he was born it was, it was, East Pakistan I guess at that point, and then there was the civil war and

his family moved to Karachi and then came to the United States when he was eight or nine. So, and he lived, they moved down to Texas. So they were in Texas.

CR: Did you know you always wanted to do what you're doing now?

CIR: Yes and no, like I think I was always interested in law, but after studying engineering and working as an engineer I just decided that I wanted to go back to grad school and I wasn't sure, I thought about medical school because I had the prereqs because I did chemical engineering, I thought about an MBA, I thought about an advanced engineering degree and I also thought about law school and kind of settled on law school at the end, so.

AW: What were your challenges in education?

CIR: Challenges and education. Hmmmm. [Whispers challenges to herself.] That's interesting. I---You know I always liked school from the time I was little, it was--- you know---I was one of those dorky nerdy kids that like got really excited for the first day and, you know, read constantly, so I always enjoyed that. It was a little bit challenging moving around, you know, when I was younger but I think, you know, part of me likes, I don't know, maybe I guess more willing to go out and meet people. When I went to engineering school, that was a challenge, it was, you know I don't think I had as much of a math and science background as some of the kids that went there, so it was a little bit of a challenge and it didn't come as easily to me as other areas, you know like law school, that was a little easier. So I think—I probably, you know, just kind of getting up to speed on the math and science in college maybe that was, you know, that was a—definitely a challenge.

NT: Did you think you were going to back to work after your kids grew up a little?

CIR: Yeah, I think I always wanted to work but I didn't want to work, you know, probably, I wanted to work less than full time, so, because I wanted to have, you know, what I consider to be a good balance, where I get to spend a lot of time with them, but then also, you know, got to work a little bit. I kind of thought that was the best for both of us, so.

AW: What role has religion played in your life?

CIR: That's a good question! Well, I grew up Catholic, My dad was, or is, Roman Catholic, my mom is Malachi Catholic, it's...

AW: What is...

CIR: Malachi? It is...it's similar to Greek Orthodox, but they, but the Malachi's recognize the pope, whereas in Greek Orthodoxy [laughs] they, you know, they,

yeah, they don't, so it is, it is considered Catholic, but it's--if, the Church actually that I went to is here in Worcester (Massachusetts), and it's just, it's very much more like in the style of like a Greek Orthodox, you know, there's a lot of chanting, a lot of the mass was in Greek, the incense, the econography. So even though they're both Catholic, it was different, like I actually I received double sacraments because they had sacraments at different times, so that was kind of different and interesting, went to Catholic high school, and then, while I was in high school stopped regularly going to Mass and haven't really gone since but consider myself spiritual [laughs] but my husband grew up Muslim, so, but he doesn't practice either, so we are at a little bit of a crossroad with the children (laughs) as to what to do, haven't done too much so far, which from what I can tell from reading is fairly common with a lot of people [laughs] in our age bracket and trying to work it out. They do go to their preschool, they're in preschool now, and it is at a church, so they do, and actually I think they're going to go to Catholic kindergarten so we just need to sort of work it out, it's—you know—we, I guess, embrace spirituality [laughs] but we're sort of trying to figure out the religion component, so.

AW: Maybe you should try both.

CIR: (laughs) Yeah that would be interesting. Yeah, I'm not sure.

AW: Do you consider yourself active politically?

CIR: I keep up with politics, I have strong and definite ideas on politics, I don't, you know, I vote, but I don't participate in the political process in that I don't, you know, actively—I haven't actively campaigned yet, though I think I may in 2012. So, I don't -- so I don't know, I don't know how you define active. I definitely have very strong beliefs if, you know I keep with things. I think Rachel Maddow is a goddess [laughs] and basically agree with almost everything that she says, and, you know, I love Obama. I had a real hard time with Bush, and I lived in Texas at the time so it was double hard. So that was challenging. But, so yeah, so I guess I have definite opinions and I vote, but I haven't, like got on really actively campaigning...yet.

CR: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

CIR: I have two sisters and a step-sister. It's always hard, I'm one of those modern (laughs) I don't know if you call it modern families or what, but it's kind of—yeah I have one—so, I have one sister who's four and a half years younger than me, and she, you know, my parents are her mom and dad. I have one sister who had just graduated from college and she's—her mom is my stepmom, and her dad's my dad. And then I have a step-sister who's, you know, my step-mother's daughter, who's older than me. She's four years older than me, so. I'm trying to think, she may have gone to Assumption [College] [laughs] I should know that

All: [laughs]

CIR: I have a lot—like I have an uncle and aunt who went to Assumption, some cousins, and Christine, I know she started at Union [College], but I'm trying to think, I—where she graduated from, I think she might have graduated from Assumption, so, anyways.

NT: It's local [laughs]

CIR: [laughs]

CR: Do you have any hobbies you like to do, or regular leisure activities?

CIR: I like to get to the gym whenever I can, I workout, I like to do anything with the kids, so go to children's museums, go to parks, yeah I like to do anything outdoors, though I probably don't do nearly enough of that, but I do love to be outside. I don't know, mostly hanging and playing with the kids—you know I like movies certainly...

CR: Yeah

CIR: I like to read though I don't do it enough. I'm trying to think what else. Those are probably the main ones, kind of normal stuff. I don't like stamp collect or anything [laughs]

All: [laughs]

AW: Ok. Let me ask you some questions about Worcester. What challenges do you think the city still faces and what would you do to change the challenges?

CIR: What challenges do they still face and what...what would I do to change those challenges. Wow. Well, I think they're really trying—I guess being, you know, an attorney and a lot of our clients are businesses, I know they're trying to, you know, draw a lot of business to the area and they have different programs, you know, they seem like they're doing a good job with like biotech and kind of capitalizing off of some of the resources that are already here like some of the hospitals and things. I think they're doing a good job with that. I'm trying to...I'm trying to think. It's interesting I guess just because of the infrastructure because it is an older city. They're trying—I don't have a good sense, you know, I know that there are different projects in the work, you know, works with kind of a downtown area, but honestly I don't know that I'm up to speed enough politically like with the local politics on what's going on really to know, you know, I know kind of what they're working on, but I don't...I don't have a good sense of rating it, I guess. I do—the only...one of the only real things I do specifically with Worcester is I'm on the advisory board for the Salvation Army, so I kind of get to see things, you know, from that angle, but

that's...that's a different, you know, it's different and, I guess my knowledge is somewhat isolated, I just know what the Salvation Army does and their mission and things. So in general, like advice for what to do, unfortunately I think I'm a little bit at a loss, like I could guess on a few things but I wouldn't really know [laughs].

AW: What about women's experiences in Worcester?

CIR: Women's experiences? In Worcester. So, well—I mean I guess starting off back in high school I thought going to an all-girls -- you know, going to Notre Dame, an all-girls high school -- I thought was great, I thought it was very, very empowering. I'm a big proponent of women's education. I think, you know, I mean it's—I think it's a good environment up here, you know, I mean I think a lot of people politically lean towards (??) I think sometimes that's helpful though that's not the only component I guess. You know, I'm part of some women's bar groups and things like that, so that's kind of nice in terms of bonding.

CIR: I'm part of the Metrowest Women's Bar, it's part of like the Women's Bar Association of Massachusetts. So that's nice, just in terms of not working. I'm trying to think of other experiences. It's kind of difficult because I was here through high school and then I really wasn't back until about three years ago, so...I'm trying to think if there's anything else. (Long Pause). Not specifically in Worcester, you know (laughs a little). I guess, you know I mean I was like an engineer, there aren't a lot of women that work as engineers so, you know there's some experiences through there, different things.

CR: How were—I already asked that question. How were the girls treated when you were in school, like probably college?

CIR: I think pretty well, I mean Columbia was also like very liberal, you know, I was—most engineering schools are overwhelmingly—you know the percentages are overwhelmingly, you know, male dominated I guess. But I think I more saw maybe the first disparity I saw was when I started working, I think there was just sort of a preconception, at least. Not the company I was at, I enjoyed it, but I think the—you know, I think there was—I think they thought that sort of, you know, men, boys, whatever, could kind of maybe handle more responsibilities and could kind of get out in the field and sort of do more of the, you know the physical work, or hands-on work, you know, a little better. So I think—I think I was—I think some of maybe the assignments that I had—some of the projects that I had I did notice that, and I think actually when I left the company I did bring that up. Although when I moved out to California, the group I was in was almost all women, so that was—that was a nice change. I think some—I think things now, like if you look at—I guess if you want to call it broadly, like, you know, disparate treatment let's say in the work place, it's not as—you know I imagine, let's say fifty years ago, was very out in the open, you know, and now, it's more difficult, I think, to tell—like I think it's still

there in large part, you know, in different industries and things, but it's more difficult to kind of put your finger on it pinpoint. But then actually I worked as a lawyer, I didn't—even though I was at Right Wing Conservative (laughs) Firm, I didn't actually find any of that—I had a really, you know, a good work situation and I didn't feel at all like I was treated differently, so I think it just kind of...

AW/NT: Depends

CIR: Yeah, depends on the people, depends on the industry.

AW: What were—are, or slash are your primary responsibility in terms of housework?

CIR: Oh at home?

AW: Yeah.

CIR: Well, my husband and I really share everything almost equally. I think that—I think from what I hear that is a trend now like, you know, families nowadays. So, he—you know, I do a lot of the cooking but he helps out and will do a lot of the kitchen cleaning and clean up and things. We kind of share, you know we share laundry duties. We definitely share childcare. I'm trying to think like some of the other things at home. Fortunately we do have—we have someone who helps us out with the yard and we have someone who helps us with the cleaning [laughs]. We're not very strong in those areas [laughs], luckily there are others that are and will take our money in exchange for their services [laughs]. I'm trying to think of like what other things. I don't know, we're both about equally handy in trying to fix things around the house, and by that I mean, neither of us are really handy [laughs]. We share about the same skill sets. So I don't think--he does take out the trash, thank goodness. I appreciate that [laughs]. Other than that, yeah I think we share--that was something I always wanted, and that's I think what's nice to--he's at the firm too, he also has a flexible work schedule. So we can kind of juggle between clients and meeting and childcare. We have a nanny, a part-time nanny. So we kind of make it all work, and its nice because—at least for what we like. Everyone, you know, has a different kind of bend on what they want. I think it works out well, I think we spend a lot of time together, we have a happy marriage, it's—I think the kids are doing well, and it's nice—it's nice, I think, to have the balance there, so.

NT: How do you define success in your life and has the definition changed over time?

CIR: I define—I guess success is like happiness and balance. Yes, the definition has changed. I think when I was younger I think I defined success in terms of financial wealth [laughs] so I think I thought, you know, when I get older as long as I have a nice car and a big house that I was very successful with my career, that would be success. But that's not how I define it now at all. I think I—it's very much just about, you know, what

you prioritize, you know, we prioritize the kids definitely first and foremost, and then sort of making sure that everyone's happy, you know, in kind of every aspect of life. So, I think, you know, enjoying every day, which is nice. Back when I was working a lot, like at big firms you had to work a lot of hours, and so I would just so look forward to the weekends. But now it's like everyday is good. So every day is kind of a balance, and you know, we enjoy the little things, we enjoy going grocery shopping, making breakfast. We cook a lot at home (laughs). And I like that. So I think—and the kids are happy, we have plenty of playing time, a lot of time to play with them, plenty of time to spend together. So to me, that's success. It's having time for everything that we want to do, although we are pretty much homebodies. And you know, just kind of feeling—you know, getting plenty of sleep, plenty of downtime, you know, plenty of playing time with the kids. And then also obviously work. Having a good, you know, having a successful practice, making sure clients are happy and all that, but I think in a way, I almost think that when your home life is in balance it's easier to balance your work life because the stress is kind of, you know, you can kind of, you know, so if things get a little busy, well that's fine you can do it when the kids go to sleep or you take on the extra work but everything else is good it doesn't feel like a drain.

NT: How do you feel about the choices you've made and do you have any regrets?

CIR: For the most part I'm pretty happy with my choices. I—I'm trying to think, like I, you know, I guess I liked the schools I went to, I liked what I studied, I really liked my jobs. Regrets? I think—I think it would have been nice to mellow out a little bit earlier than I did, I was kind of, I think, a little more high strung, more type A when I was younger. And so, you know, I guess part of it is getting older and wiser and all that. But it would have been nice to kind of mellow out, not take things quite as seriously maybe when I was younger, maybe have like a little more, you know, fun, and things. Yeah I guess, you know what I mean, I—so, maybe that, but that's kind of hard—It's a hard one, but that, maybe that if I could just have gone back and been a bit more mellow.

NT: Based on your life experience, would advice would you give to women of today and future generations?

CIR: Well, I've always been a planner. And so, I think planning is good. Now my husband's not at all, never was a planner. He always was just like “Ah, you know, whatever happens, happens, you know, you can't control it so why try?” But I think planning is good, you know, I was always very much about these are the things I want to accomplish before I have kids so that when I have kids, you know, my lifestyle can be like this. Now I know that doesn't work for everybody and everyone's different, but I think that at least for me that's been helpful, because when, you know, I had my schooling behind me, I had my work experience behind me. Now I did have kids a little bit later, and there I think are some advantages to having kids earlier too, but for us, I think for our family it works. So I would say kind of plan--think things out, and certainly, you know go and, you know, everything you want to do, you know kind of put your all

behind it. I don't really feel like there was anything that I wanted to do that I didn't do, you know, I really—like I enjoyed living on the west coast, that was something that I always wanted, to live in a foreign country or—not that California qualifies, but (laughs).

NT: It's a lot different though.

CIR: It is—it is. So I think that was great. I traveled a lot, you know I've been—I did a summer when I was in high school in Australia. I, you know, I kind of traveled all over Europe, I've been to Japan, I've, you know, been all over. I really enjoy traveling, so I think that's fun. So I'd just say, you know kind of do whatever it is that you want to do, and that you're interested in, kind of pursue it with everything. Yeah pursue it, you know with everything so you kind of—when you look back you don't have any regrets. I think a lot of times I think “Oh I'm only going through this once so I'm going to do, you know, do it, there—just not to be afraid to try something different, cause really, what's the worst thing that could happen?”

NT: Do you feel like you have a legacy?

CIR: Well certainly my kids. And then I think as time goes on I would like to leave more of a legacy in the community. Like I've been working with the Salvation Army and I enjoy that. But I think as the kids get a little bit older I would like to even, you know, try and do more community service. My husband is now working with the Worcester County Food Bank and so I think that we do—I think that that's an important component. When I was in Dallas I worked at the—at a soup kitchen, you know I used to go every week and I always thought that was the best part of my week. So I think that there's just really something to connecting with people on that level, and giving back. I think that's how you—I think that's kind of us at our best.

AW: Kind of like paying it forward?

CIR: Excuse me?

AW: Kind of like paying it forward?

CIR: Yeah, yeah. And—yeah. I don't know, it just it—to me it was kind of what like centered me the most, you know I kind of felt the most present, and I don't know, I enjoyed it. I used to—when I was at the soup kitchen, I came to know all the people like fairly well, and they used to always think that like I was like on probation for—cause a lot of people that's part of their probation they have to do community service.

All: Oh yeah [laughs]!

CIR: They were always—they thought I was either on probation or I was in drug rehab [laughs] and it was always like, “What?” but they just figured that I was. And then it was

fun, like whenever I'd walk around the city, I would always, you know, they'd be like, "Hey!" you know, and I'd be walking around and be like, "Oh, hi." [laughs]. So it was kind of fun.

NT: That's really funny.

AW: What memories do you have of significant, historical events that took place when you were growing up?

CIR: Well, I mean I guess when I was a little bit older, certainly 9/11, you know that's a big one, you know where I was, you know kind of how I reacted, how the country reacted.

CR: Were you in New York at that time?

CIR: No I wasn't. Though I was there when the first, though it was much less publicized, when the first time there was a bombing, you know in the basement of the Towers and things.

All: Oh yeah.

CIR: So no, but I was actually in law school in 9/11. Other significant—Well, when I was younger when the—I'll definitely date myself here, but when the space shuttle blew up, you know, when the Challenger blew up, definitely remember that. We were actually all in the auditorium watching it. We were all excited, and that was really sad. Other historical—well, you know, Bush beat Gore, the first election [laughs]. Remember that, when the Supreme Court got it completely wrong, in my opinion [laughs] and not just mine, other people's [laughs]. I'm trying to think, other historical—important historical events. Hm. I guess those are some of the ones that jump out.

NT: Do you have any other questions? (talks quietly to CR and AW)

CR: What time is it?

NT: I think we should go to this page.

CR: Yeah.

NT: Ok! Now that we are working to tell a fuller story of the history of women than has been recorded in the past, what should be sure to include?

CIR: A fuller story of women that was told in the past (to herself). Well some--I don't know if this exactly answers the question but I think that women share kind of a common bond and I think sometimes depending upon, you know, different choices that women

make sometimes they feel, like for instance, you know maybe just because where I am in my life but you know once you have kids, you obviously you make a decision, are you going to work are you going to stay home and sometimes, you know, and there are obviously pros and cons to both decisions. And I think sometimes women feel, you know, based on the decision that they've made, you know, that they are at odds with different groups that make different decisions, and I think one thing that is really important is that women realize that we all, to a certain extent, have the same, you know, the same experiences, and we have the same, you know, in terms of being married or in terms of being kids--having kids or even working or whatever, and I think it's important for women to realize the commonality that we all share so that we can support each other rather than judge, you know, just because other people make different decisions, it doesn't mean that there aren't things that they wish had been done differently, or—so sometimes I see that, where, you know, I see this, you know, divisiveness, especially kind of with the older generation and decisions that they made. Like I go to some different workshops, women's workshops and so you have the—like my mothers generation, you know kind of like the pioneering feminists and I think that a lot of them look at women of my generation and they are like well we did all this work so, you know, so there would be equality in the work place and look at this generation, all they're doing is, you know, regressing, and everything we tried to do, they are turning their backs on, and I almost feel as though there is, you know, some level of disdain. And to me, I just think, but you know, but yes they made those strides and they've made those, you know, changes so women would have options, but just because we are exercising our options doesn't mean that we don't appreciate having those options. So I think that—so I think that what's important in women's stories is kind of how, you know, the commonality that we all share, and it's not so much, you can't just label people and put them in a category because of their, you know, generation and because of decisions that they've made. So I think that's an important piece of it. Like I, you know, I guess on paper like a lot of people could look at, you know, what I do and think oh she's all about her career but yet probably eighty percent of what I talked about today was about my family. So I think that it's not so much—you can't judge a book by its' cover and I think that if people took the time to kind of, you know, go beyond, you know, what's, you know, what's on your bio, or kind of what you see, you know, that women would realize that they really do share a lot of things in common and I think it's much more important to be a support network than try and, you know because of your own insecurities, you know, judge.

NT: Do you guys have any other questions that you want to ask?

AW&CR: nope

NT: Alright, so that wraps it up!

CIR: Okay!

CR: And now, he asked us if you don't want to, you don't have to feel pressured to or anything, but if we could take a picture...

CIR: Sure!

CR: ...for the website or something?

AW: Yeah.

CIR: Yeah, that's fine!

NT: Thank you!

CIR: And if it doesn't come out or something I can always send you guys one too if you need one.

All: [Laugh].