

An Interview with
Uma Eachempati

at *The Historical Society of Missouri* St. Louis
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Oral History Program

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PREFACE

The interview was taped on a placed on a tripod. There are periodic background sounds but the recording is of generally high quality.

The following transcript represents a rendering of the oral history interview. Stylistic alterations have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee offered clarifications and suggestions, which the following transcript reflects. Any use of brackets [] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Physical gestures, certain vocal inflections such as imitation, and/or pauses are designated by a combination of italics and brackets []. Any use of parentheses () indicates a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation, or laughter. Quotation marks [""] identify speech depicting dialogue, speech patterns, or the initial use of nicknames. Em dashes [—] are used as a stylistic method to show a meaningful pause or an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech or when indicating a court case title. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. Underlining [] indicates a proper title of a publication. The use of underlining and double question marks in parentheses [(??)] denotes unintelligible phrases. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, Josephine Sporleder.

Maureen Zegel: You could start by saying your name.

Uma Eachempati: Uma Eachempati.

Maureen Zegel: If you could just start talking about your life: where did you grow up...

Uma Eachempati: Well, I was born in Madras in India in 1935 so at that time, there was a British colony. So my experience in life is different from many Indians that you meet today because they're all of a younger generation and they have all post-independent children and they do not have the background that I have. My father was a doctor and my mother was a housewife and I have a sister. I think what you really want to know is, who empowered me to where I am today. Well, I must say, my father was the main person. My mother was equally strong and she got her strength from her mother. So I think it was kind of in the family. The basic principle that the three of them gave me was that you have to be educated, you have to be economically independent and you have to learn to stand on your own feet, reason being, I mean okay, in general girls in India don't have to go to work. They don't have to study because they are under the idea of protection, they were kind of suppressed. They said, "Oh, you don't have to go and have the stresses of school and competition and why does anybody have to work only to make a living, to have money, so if you can marry a good husband who will provide for you, then you are taken care of so you don't have to struggle and avoid all the stresses of life." Well, in a way, it's a good idea but in a way also it is not a good idea because you're not developing the talents of the women. But my father strongly believed is that you need to have an education. What you do with it is something different. You may not go and get a job. You may not have to make a living for yourself. You do not have to pay the bills but it is always good to have an education because you never know what your future will be. Maybe your husband will die; maybe he gets disabled; maybe he gets unemployed. Then, with an education, you can always pitch in and do something with it. You have the option of whether you want to work or not but you must have the training.

Maureen Zegel: So you went to school?

Uma Eachempati: Right.

Maureen Zegel: Can you talk about that a little bit?

Uma Eachempati: Yeah. When I tell people they kind of get very appalled but, see, my mother got married when she was 11 and, well, marriage doesn't mean jumping into bed; it's more like, what I call, is finding her a full-time babysitter. So somebody who will watch over her for the rest of her life. My father was a second year medical student and my mother was 11 and my grandfather, he was a philosopher professor and he got an offer to go to England to teach for about six months. In those days, you went by ship which took three months to go and after six months he would come back. We are from a Brahmin family and even though we did not believe in the caste system as differentiating people, still my grandfather, he had five daughters and my mother was the third one, so he thought that when he went "abroad," and came back to India, other families may not want to marry his daughter because he's polluted because he went abroad. Abroad means non-vegetarian and loose morals in the broad sense. So in keeping with the thinking, he did not want to jeopardize his daughter's future so he got her married. She stayed with my grandmother because my grandfather went alone. She stayed with my grandmother and went to school and my father was in a different city in medical school and he would come over for the holidays and it was very funny to kind of listen to their tales because he would come home for the holidays and he would ask my mother, "Do you want to go for a movie?" and she says, "Sorry, I have to do my homework." And then he'll say, "Okay, let's finish your homework" so they'll finish the homework and then go to the movies and then all he's doing is buying her chocolates and giving her a good time. So that's how my mother got married at 11. But my father, being a medical student who has seen a lot of his patients coming from different walks of life: the poor people and the educated and everybody, and so he thought that education was a very important thing. And so he made my mother...she is a college graduate. She had to be. She was in college and then she got pregnant and she had her two babies and then she went back and finished her college, and that was on the insistence of my father because he strongly believed that women need an education. He's a doctor and so he thought his two daughters have to become doctors because the importance of being a doctor is you are never unemployed and that was job security right there and you can always be self-employed. You don't have to work for anybody and not only you made a living, but you also helped society. He strongly believed that those of us who have been privileged have to help those who are less

privileged. So he worked on my sister from the time she was born and said, "Oh, you will be a doctor. You will be a doctor" and then she'd see a mouse running and she'd jump up onto the sofa and she just hated the sight of blood and so then he thought, oh, this is no doctor material. So when I came along, he started the same story. He kept telling me, "You're going to be a doctor" and I didn't seem to object too much to it. So by the time I finished my schooling and I was to apply to medical school, at that point he told me, he says, "You do not have to go to medical school. You do not have to become a doctor. If you want to get married and be a housewife and live a luxurious life of idleness, then you are welcome to do it. I'm not going to force you." So then I told him, I said, "My whole life I've been thinking I'm going to be a doctor and now you're telling me I don't have to." I said, "Well, I don't know what else to do. I think I will go to medical school." Then he says, "Okay, it's your choice so you can go." So that's how I became a doctor.

Maureen Zegel: Can you back up just a little bit and just say a little something about what school was like for you. What was it like for a woman in the 1940's?

Uma Eachempati: Well, see, my father was in the government service which meant he got transferred every two years and so I started off in a convent school in Madras but then when he got transferred, we went to the districts and, as you know, India has many languages so the first district we went to, the medium of instruction was in one language. Two years later he got transferred and then so the medium of instruction the next place was a different language. Then again, two years later, he got transferred and the third district had a different language, and at that point I was in the last year of high school and so my mother said, "This is ridiculous. You are not going to learn anything by changing languages." So she left me back with my grandmother in Madras, with the English medium of instruction and I finished high school there. Most of the girls, I mean, my classmates, most of them were from middle class and all of them went to school and all of them were...because a little bit of education is required for you to get married. When a boy or a family, they choose and arrange a marriage, they look for a girl, they don't want a total illiterate so they would like somebody who would be a good partner and share the boy's life and if they come from...there are two different intelligence levels or social levels, they did not think it would be a good partnership. So, girls did go to school but half of them went on to college and in college, there

were a handful of girls who were married but they would just do liberal arts and there were just a few people who went on to professional colleges. After I got married and I was in medical school, my mother took me along to one of her social functions...

Maureen Zegel: Can I ask you to just back up just a little bit. You got married while you were in college?

Uma Eachempati: No, I finished my medicine. I finished my first year internship and then I got married.

Maureen Zegel: And how did you meet this person?

Uma Eachempati: Well, that was an arranged marriage. I have quite a few opinions about love marriage and arranged marriage and that kind of thing because that question keeps popping up all the time. Arranged marriage...if you had asked me, I'd like an arranged marriage because I don't have a daughter but I would hate for her to...somehow to me, it seems like a girl in the west, from the time she is, like, a teenager, she starts looking for boys and she starts trying to...to me, it sounds like soliciting and it doesn't appeal to me. I don't know whether it's a cultural thing because I think it's understood that you go look for a boy and you date and you don't think anything of it. But having come from a different culture, I feel a little inhibited. I said, why do I have to worry about that stupid boy. Well, okay, I like this guy but I don't know...somehow I feel the handsome guy is the bad guy because he will have an attitude because he's good-looking, he has an attitude that he thinks all the girls are going to fall for him and he's not going to treat you well. It may be a prejudice; it may be a wrong impression but I would watch out. Then you have to go flirting with him and then you had to come home, will he call me; will he not call me, and cry your eyes out: Oh, he rejected me. He went with that girl. I think teenagers, they are young girls, they're protected from all that stress. In a way, I think...I was talking to one of the girls, a young girl, a young one half my age and she says, oh, she was having boy trouble and she says, "Oh, I don't know about these men. Why do they think that of themselves? What would you do?" and I said, "Oh, I'm sorry, I cannot help you in this matter because I was given a husband on a silver platter and I didn't have to deal with all this." So I think the arranged marriages, in a way, protect the girl from having to go and hunt for a husband because the family does a lot of...arranged marriages, they do a lot of

background check. The father's responsibility to get his daughter married like it is his job to get his son educated and produce the money to send him to college, but the family does a good background check. They try and match up with the same status, like to get a boy who has an education, which means that he has a job and he can provide for your daughter. The way I got married, my father, he consulted with all these other colleagues and friends and one of the principles of medical school, he told my father, he says, "Oh, I think I have the right boy for your daughter. He's of the same caste. He's good-looking and he's intelligent. He gets all A grades and he comes from a good family and I think they'll make a good match" and one of the qualifications he had is, "Oh, he's such a bookworm, he doesn't hang after the girls," which was a plus point for him because he didn't hang after girls. Even a girl, if she doesn't hang after the boys, it's a plus point for her, like, okay, she's not cheap; she's not...her values are different. She concentrates on her studies and she doesn't waste her time; she's organized. So they all kind of imply character. So that's how I got married. My father is a doctor and he was in administration at that point in my life and I finished college and I went to his office to pick him up. And then it so happened that my future husband was there and he was with my father in the office and he was looking for a job and so I was just waiting in the car and then my father sent somebody and said, "Well, your father wants you to come in." So I went into the office and then I met...he was there and my father introduced me, he said, "My daughter" and so I had a look at him and then they did their business and we left. After we came home, my father told my mother, he said, "Oh, that's a nice boy I met today, so I ask Uma what she thought of him; would she like to marry him?" So then I said, "Oh, I have no idea with one look of him. I mean, I think his nose was too long" and then my father said, "Oh, he's just thin because he lost weight. He just finished all his post-graduate exams and he was studying. He'll put on weight and he'll look okay." So that was the beginning. We had more family get-togethers, his family meeting my family. So that's when the negotiation started and they did ask me, "Would you like to marry him? If you say 'no,' we won't push you any further," because arranged marriage doesn't mean that you are forced to get married to somebody who's unknown. So I didn't have any reason not to like him because I don't know anything about him, but then I trusted my parents' judgment because, like I said, they had done their homework and they asked

relatives who knew those relatives, then they asked colleagues and, you know, what kind of a guy is he. Then the engagement took place.

Maureen Zegel: And so you went to medical school and then you married a doctor?

Uma Eachempati: Mm-hmm.

Maureen Zegel: When did you come to the United States?

Uma Eachempati: We came for a year in 1963 and stayed in Boston and at that time...it is quite common for people to go abroad for advancement. A lot of the humanities, they go to England and Oxford, Cambridge. Half my family has gone to Oxford and Cambridge and gotten their Master's and Ph.D.s but in the medicine at that time, we came on a fellowship for what we call "advanced studies." So we went back and then we applied for a green card. So we came back in '69 with a green card.

Maureen Zegel: So you liked it here in the United States?

Uma Eachempati: Yeah, we thought children would have better opportunities because when I came in '63, I came with one child and then I went back and had a second child and then I came back with two children. My husband had done his required entrance exams and all that but I hadn't and so I did it after I came here and then I joined into my residency.

Maureen Zegel: So you did your residency here?

Uma Eachempati: Yes.

Maureen Zegel: Were you in Boston or did you come to St. Louis?

Uma Eachempati: St. Louis. The first time, we went for one year in Boston on a fellowship but then this time, we went through the licensings so had to do all the state exams and the licensing exams, residency and everything.

Maureen Zegel: What university?

Uma Eachempati: St. Louis U. It was just random because my husband was doing a fellowship and he asked his colleagues, he said, "Where should I apply for residency?" He said, "I come from St. Louis. Actually, it's a pretty good place," so he said, "Okay," and he came to St. Louis. We didn't really choose it. We just stumbled on it.

- Maureen Zegel: So your residency at St. Louis University Hospital in what field?
- Uma Eachempati: OB-GYN. That's what I did in India. I had worked in India for 10 years and then I thought, with having to take care of my children and doing all the housework, which I didn't do in India, that it's better for me to do something I'm already familiar with than have to learn a new subject.
- Maureen Zegel: So when you got to this country, how did you compare it, as far as women were concerned, opportunities for women? Here you were, a female doctor. Were there a lot of female physicians at the time, in '69 with children at the same time?
- Uma Eachempati: Right. Well, during my residency, I did between 1969 and '72, three years. America has changed since then. At that time, we were delivering a lot of babies who came through Catholic Charities and these were all unmarried mothers who gave up their babies and I think 20 years later, people started keeping their babies and it wasn't taboo anymore. But then doctors, they were quite a handful and actually, I think St. Louis University residency program, all the women were Indians. It was funny that one time, when we were working in a City Hospital, we were rotating, we were in City Hospital, the OB Department is fully of Indian women doctors and the Pediatric Department was full of Pakistani doctors and here we are dealing with an American baby, India and Pakistan and they're having a war back in India. And we said, "Okay, we are Indian; you're Pakistani, but we are dealing with an American baby so forget your roots." So, all kinds of strange situations happen when you are getting global but I think that has made life quite interesting. During my residency, I ran into these unmarried mothers but during my practice, I was in practice from 1975 until 2000, about 25 years, and I've seen a lot of women and a lot of them with different problems and I don't think women in America are that empowered like they should be. I mean, if you go down to Jefferson County, most of my practice was there and the stories the girls tell, I mean, it's quite sad.
- Maureen Zegel: What kinds of stories? Can you talk about the kinds of stories that young American women...
- Uma Eachempati: The one story that really sticks out in my head which I still cannot understand today, a woman, she's a pharmacist and she is pregnant with her second baby and she came with the first baby who was one year old

and I can still see it, that little one-year-old with a bottle in her mouth, walking along the office. A few months later, I hear that the child has died and Cardinal Glennon found that the child was battered and the child died and they reported to the police and they found that it was the father of the second baby and they charged him and he ran away to a different state. I mean, most of my information is kind of patchy, not really detailed because I only get to know what they tell me and I don't ask too many questions because they may not want me to know too many questions. Then the next thing I know, I delivered the baby and the next thing I know, she's moving out of state to join that man. I said, "How can you go back to that man who killed your child?" She says, "Well, this is his baby. He won't treat it badly. I need a man in my life." I cannot understand that philosophy.

Maureen Zegel: I can see that, from your story you just told.

Uma Eachempati: How frantic can you be to have a man in your life? And she's educated. She's a pharmacist. She can have a job on her own. She didn't have to marry for money. She didn't have to marry for a roof over her head. But why she did that, I still today cannot understand and I hope that second baby is all right.

Maureen Zegel: Did you continue practicing in Jefferson County?

Uma Eachempati: Yeah, I continued there. Then there was another patient who really sticks in my mind. She came for her prenatal checkup and then I said, "How are you?" She said, "Oh, the floods have come and I lost my house and I lost my car and I'm living with my mother," and the next visit, she comes and I say, "How are you?" She says, "Don't ask me any questions" because she was going through challenge after challenge but she stuck it out. They all helped each other out and I'm sure she made it. In my practice, it was not just doing medicine. I got into the private lives of a lot of women and I don't think the women in America are really empowered, not at that time anyway. My neighbor across the street where I live, she had her mother living with her and she was a school teacher and she was like about 19 when I was talking to her and then I said to her, I said, "Well, the women in India are second-class citizens" and then she says, "Even here," and I was surprised, it coming from an American woman because I thought, well, things were different here but nowadays, I think in medical school, 50% are women and so women are catching on into being

working women. I don't like to use the word "working women" because I think my very first working woman that I met was my maidservant, the cleaning ladies. They're all working women. You don't have to be in corporate to be a working woman, don't you think?

Maureen Zegel: Oh, yeah, they really work.

Uma Eachempati: Yeah, they are working women. Whatever job you are doing, they have a job outside and they have a job at home. It's not a job...I also was a working woman but I had to take care of my children and, like I said, I had to do the cooking, even if you did have somebody to come clean. You had to make arrangements to keep the door open, things like that. I mean, there is still a lot more of organizing to be done. Being a housewife is an administrative job. I mean, you have to really know how to get everything together. Again, this is...another big controversy is my pet peeve, housewives who kind of protest and say, "We're also working; we are also working hard" but they don't understand the working woman does a double job. I mean, of course, we cut corners because there is only 24 hours in a day. My windows may not be spic-and-span but then some basics of dropping the children in school, taking care of the children, all that is still there and you still do a double duty.

Maureen Zegel: How many children did you have?

Uma Eachempati: Two. But again, I see a lot of...both my children went to a Catholic school and I see a lot of the mothers, they are housewives but they spend their time usefully. They volunteer in the class and they volunteer in baking or whatever but they do a lot of social work, outside, helping others, fundraising, all those things. And I like those kind of women who participate in outside activities other than running the home and I am sad to say that many of the women in my Indian community...since I am a doctor, I have a lot of other doctor friends and a lot of them...half of them are not doctors; they are housewives and those housewives...there's really nothing very much to do after your kids go off to school and then you have a little spare time when they are gone and then when they go off to college, then you get some more spare time. I am sorry that these women did not get Americanized enough to go and do volunteer work.

Maureen Zegel: Are they sorry?

Uma Eachempati: No, I think they still bring their Indian culture with them. Your husband works and you have fun.

Maureen Zegel: But you didn't have that same drive?

Uma Eachempati: No. Well, since my family background was different, and actually, one time in India, when I was in medical school, went for some social party and then there was one elderly lady who asked my mother, she said, "Is she your stepdaughter?" She said, "No, she's mine." She said, "No, how is it that your first daughter, you got her married and she is not working and why did you put this girl into medical school? I mean, why are you punishing her by sending her to medical school and asking her to go make money? Is she your stepdaughter?" So you'd think that going out to work is a bad thing when you have a husband. It's like an insult to the husband and the husband's family that he's not able to bring in a proper paycheck to provide for her and so you say, "Oh, you didn't have to go work and make money. We provide for you. You can stay home."

Maureen Zegel: What was it like as a woman in medical school in India when you were there? Were there many women?

Uma Eachempati: No, no problem. I went to a different medical school. I went to the Christian Medical College in Bellor. It's run by American missionaries. So we were a class of 50 and we were 25 girls to 25 boys. But in the general state medical school, I think the girls were, like, 20% and occasionally you will find a girl comes from a middle class family who doesn't have the need to go to work and who just wants to save humanity. I mean, what other reason she goes to medical school other than that? But most of them are from poor families who needed a bread-winner or some of them were widowed and had to fend for themselves because remarriage is not very common those days and so it's only someone who needed the livelihood went to medical school.

Maureen Zegel: Can you talk a little bit...it's about 15 minutes to go. Could you talk a little bit about what it would have been like if you were born earlier? Well, you talked a little bit about your mother and father and your mother went to college. What about other people?

Uma Eachempati: Well, see, my mother, she's the third one of five sisters. The first two got married at about 13 or 14, which is the normal age for that age and they did not go to college. My mother went to college because my father

pushed her. Her two younger sisters went to college. They were married and went to college and the youngest sister, she actually took her teacher's training and she was a teacher. As you know, India is vast population, that there are the urban people, the village people and then there are the village people who come and work in the city.

Maureen Zegel: Village?

Uma Eachempati: Village, villages. So the thinking is different. The village thinking is different from the urban thinking and even in the urban thinking, the richer class people...I mean, there are millionaires and the business people who have big businesses and those families, they don't think the girls need to work but people like us, the middle-class, it all depends on the family. A family makes a big difference. If your family believes in the education and empowerment of women and so you go out and you do this and then there are these other families who say, "Oh, no, you can just get married and you don't have..." ...they don't encourage the girls. Like, a girl may be very talented...I know one girl who used to sing beautifully and then she went down and make albums and all that and then she got married and that was it because her in-laws didn't want her going out into the world and "exposing" herself. The same thing, I love to dance. I love to dance and I was wanting to learn...a couple of my friends were learning to dance, Indian classical dancing, and I wanted to learn and then my father said, "No, because you're not going to go up on stage and expose your body to the public." I mean, that was the thinking. So I didn't. He says, "Oh, you go study. You've got better things to do" but that thinking has changed now. What's surprising, I came here to America, my children were in high school and there was a little bit of relief as far as time goes and then I developed a frozen shoulder and then I had to go for rehab and do all kinds of exercises. So then I said, if I can do all these kind of exercises, I think I can go and join dancing; it's the same. And so I called up...there was a local dance teacher and so I called her up and I said to her, "What age do you take your students?" She says, "Are you talking about your daughter?" I said, "No, I'm talking about myself" and then she said, "Oh, well, you can come and try and let's see how it goes." And so I did. And then, well, I did pretty good and I started dancing when I was 14, just had a passion for it and so then I did, I joined her and I was in a troupe for about five years. I enjoyed it, I traveled.

Maureen Zegel: What kind of dance?

Uma Eachempati: Indian classical dancing. Through her, I went up to New York actually, I forget the auditorium and somebody told me Liza Minnelli danced on that. I said, "Oh," so I said, "What do you know? Liza Minnelli and me!" I don't know about the quality of the dance but I did it and actually, the first time I went on stage after I learned my parents were visiting me and then my parents were in the audience and one of my friends asked my father, said, "Oh, what do you think of your daughter dancing at this age" and he says, "It's a great experiment in human determination." I said, "That's my father." He takes everything so seriously and has to give a big name to it and I said, "Oh, you didn't want me to dance when I was young but now here I am, a grown up adult," but of course, times have changed and he didn't mind it at all. I think in a way he was proud. My mother encouraged me. She loves to sing and so when I wanted to dance, she said, "Okay." I've done all kinds of strange things.

Maureen Zegel: How did you bring up your children?

Uma Eachempati: How did I bring them up? Well...

Maureen Zegel: The cultures.

Uma Eachempati: Well, I am a vegetarian and my husband, he eats meat. He used to eat meat in India, itself. I think it was a teenage thing, how you rebel and do things your parents don't want you to do. So, he was smoking and eating meat and venturing out. But I did not but I told my children, "When you go to school, you eat whatever you like. I'm not going to tell you, 'Don't eat meat; don't this; don't that.'" I said, "Just do whatever you feel comfortable with so they both eat meat and I have gotten to a point that I cook at home but I don't eat it and somebody asked me, he said, "Oh, how do you feel cooking meat? You're cooking meat?!" I said, "Oh, well, having gone through medical school, I've done anatomy dissections and autopsies and so holding a piece of flesh doesn't bother me. It still kind of bothers me, my children eating that kind of feels gruesome but, well, they need to do what they need to do.

Maureen Zegel: And they are grown?

Uma Eachempati: Oh, yeah, they're grown.

Maureen Zegel: Do they have children?

Uma Eachempati: Oh, no, they don't.

Maureen Zegel: Do they live here?

Uma Eachempati: Yeah, they're here in America. We brought them here to enjoy the West and so, no, they are here. There was one time, my 10-year-old boy, he was talking back to me and I said, "Oh, you don't talk back to your mother." I said, "I didn't talk back to my mother and you should not talk back to your parents." So he says, "If you didn't talk back to your mother, you were stupid, I can't help it." I said, "Oh? Well, I suppose so." I kind of taught that times were different, surroundings were different. One of the times I was telling my son something and...my older boy is the one that always had problem but he's a good boy. I told him, I said, "I will tell you what I do not like in what you are doing and you have to tell me what you do not like in what I'm doing." I said, "I'm learning on the job." So we kind of made an arrangement, that you tell me and I tell you and then we'll work it out. I really had to learn on the job because the methods of bringing up the way my mother brought me up was totally different from dealing with boys in America. So finally we made it; we are all right.

Maureen Zegel: Do you think there's anything we've missed? Is there something you wanted to talk about about being a woman and all of the things in your life that you think were significant?

Uma Eachempati: I think it's nicer to be a woman than a man.

Maureen Zegel: Why is that?

Uma Eachempati: Because I think the women enjoy more experiences. A man goes to work, women also go to work but I think the relationship of mother and child is totally different from father and child because you are pregnant, you bring them up, they're just a part of you and that experience I don't think a father can get, however good a father he is. He misses out a little bit, that extra that the women get. So I think it's nicer to be a woman. You have more experiences, but again, you are also very vulnerable. You need to have the right family around you. You need to have the good support. A good family is very, very important. My family is what made me today. They're the ones that told me, "You study, you work hard, the world is at your feet" and I don't think all the girls in India have that opportunity.

- Maureen Zegel: Or the ones in America.
- Uma Eachempati: Right. Well, you do what you can do.
- Maureen Zegel: I'm thinking of the woman in Jefferson County.
- Uma Eachempati: Yeah, the Indian women, I think they have built in strength and I always...whenever I had problems, I would always think of...I don't know, I think it comes from the Bible: "In silence lies your strength." I don't know whether it's from the Bible but I thought it's from the Bible, "In silence lies your strength" and I think that is very true. You just take care of things in silence instead of frittering away your energy, calling up this friend, calling up that friend, oh, oh, oh, you know. I have lived a good life. I've had a lot of opportunities and I was happy...as long as I was working, I never went to the temple because I thought I was doing good service and I didn't need to go to the temple. Now that I'm not working anymore, I said, maybe I need to do something else to replace.
- Maureen Zegel: What religion are you?
- Uma Eachempati: I'm born a Hindu.
- Maureen Zegel: Hindu?
- Uma Eachempati: Yeah, but I am not into rituals.
- Maureen Zegel: You went to a Christian medical school.
- Uma Eachempati: Yeah, I went to a Christian medical school and in the very beginning, I was in the convent and even my mother went to a convent in Calcutta. Actually, she went to learn at the convent from where Mother Teresa came and my children priory school so Christian doesn't bother us. I think Ten Commandments is what any religion says, the Ten Commandments: Be honest and work hard. Hard work and honesty will give you a good life.
- Brian Woodman : So I had one question: Earlier in the interview, you referred to the issue of negotiations when it came to arranged marriage and in the United States we think negotiation is just very like a business, like a handshake transaction but it sounds like it's a lot more complex when you're doing negotiations about marriage. Can you talk about that?

Uma Eachempati: Yeah. Well, when I got married, in our family, none of the girls gave any dowry and none of the boys took any dowry and since then, I think it is illegal in India to take a dowry. So part of the negotiations mentions, we do not take dowry and we do not give dowry and if you have a problem with that, well, we call it quits right now. But when I got married, in my case it was different but then, in some others, they would say, "Oh, once she gets married, she doesn't have to go to college. She need not study anymore." So part of the negotiations will kind of say, "Well, she will finish college." Like, my sister, she got married when she was in college but then, she went on to law school and finished law school. And so part of the negotiations is kind of told gently, the girl will develop herself and she will do what she likes, within boundaries but she is not going to just obey you and sit at home and she's not going to be doing all the household chores and she's not going to be ordered around. Funny, in my case, we are Hindus and my name is Uma which is the name of the Goddess Parati who's the wife of Shiva. Now, the other god in the trinity is Vishnu and so the Vishnu followers do not marry into Shivite followers. On my husband's side, they were the Vishnivites and my name is Uma and I'm the Shivite. I mean, in my family, we're not very particular. I was named Uma just for no rhyme or reason. They just liked the name, nice and short and sweet. So the other party, not his father but he sent his cousin, said, "Oh, well, after they get married, we need to change her name into a Vishnivite name because Uma is very strongly Shivite. So what does it matter if her name is Uma or we'll change it to Rama, which is a Vishnivite name." So then my mother...she is a very strong feminist and she told them, she said, "Sorry, she's not going to change her name." She said, "She was born Uma and she'll die Uma and if you don't like it, get lost." And so promptly came his father...I mean this is the way they work: they find themselves a way out, so the cousin comes and then the father comes in and says, "Oh, I've very sorry. We are very broad-minded. We didn't mean it. He is very a narrow-minded fellow. I put the blame on him," and said, "No, it doesn't matter. We like the girl and we'll marry her, no qualms about all this." This is what I mean, negotiations. I mean, it's surprising. So I am Uma and I will die Uma.

Maureen Zegel: Well, Uma, I want to thank you very much. You have been just a joy to talk to and I thank you for your time and for sharing your story with an awful lot of people. I think you're an inspiration to many.

Uma Eachempati: Thank you. Thank you.