

Shloka Kini, Class of 2013
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Community and Dartmouth's World
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WOMICK: To get us started, I'm Cally Womick, and I'm here in Rauner Library with Shloka Kini. Right?

KINI: Got it.

WOMICK: Today is Friday, May 17, 2013. To get started, why don't you talk about where you grew up?

KINI: Okay. Where I grew up... I grew up in Indiana. So not the main part of Indiana. The northwest corner of Indiana, which is pretty close to Chicago. So, growing up, our area of Indiana was often called The Region, because it was very different from the rest of Indiana. Most of Indiana is fairly conservative. Our small corner was a little bit more liberal. It was very conservative still, but it's a little more liberal. And for the most part growing up, I really wasn't aware of this until I met other people from Indiana, that our area was almost considered part of Illinois because we were so close to Chicago. Pretty much, Chicago culture spilled over into our small corner. I grew up in a town called Schererville, which is part of a tri-town area. The school corporation in that area is called Lake Central.

Our area had one main high school which is huge, it's probably nearing the size of Dartmouth; it's like 3,000, maybe 4,000 students. And that's the main high school. When I was growing up, it was two middle schools, but now it's three because of the population. Three middle schools for the different areas of the tri-town area. Then it had, maybe I'd say six or seven, possibly more, elementary schools. And that would all be based on location, so.... It was a public school system. So...yeah. That's pretty much where I grew up. Any details you need? [Laughter]

WOMICK: No, that's good. So how'd you end up at Dartmouth?

KINI: It wasn't intentional. [Laughs.] Not to make that sound like a bad thing. But it wasn't something where I had heard about Dartmouth and, you know, really wanted to go here, and it was early decision, or I knew somebody who went there. I know nobody even now from my area who has ever come to Dartmouth. I think it was partly a

combination of my parents' worries and my own, through the college application process, that sort of resulted in me coming to Dartmouth.

So I should preface this by saying that my parents grew up in India; they were born and raised there. So my dad is now a naturalized citizen, but my mom is still an Indian citizen. But I was born and brought up here. Within, I guess, our small subsection of our large family, I'm the eldest. So there really weren't any cousins or anybody I had to compare to, you know, about the American schooling system or college applications. The whole process was very nerve-wracking for our whole family.

There weren't any predecessors or advice or tips I could get, except from, you know, school advisors or anybody we knew. So there were some very odd stipulations in the college application process for me. The first one was I wasn't going to get to visit any of the colleges, partly because they were worried, as was I, that I might set my heart on one institution; and if I don't get in there, I'll be crushed. And I know more than the rejection letter, I'd be giving myself a hard time. So that was one. Um, I applied to around 20 schools, which was horrible; just with the number of essays, the number of rewrites, the number of things to just keep track of for different universities was crazy. Of course the Common App helped. But, you know, each of these schools had their own supplement.

I applied pretty much everywhere: in-state, out-of-state...yeah, everywhere. West Coast, East Coast, Midwest. Then after I think maybe March, April, somewhere around there, when the decisions start coming back, that was when I looked at all the ones where I actually got admitted and started to look at those more seriously. I think once I started looking at those, it was between maybe two or three schools, Dartmouth being one of them.

I did get a likely letter from Dartmouth, which helped. We weren't really sure how to handle that because obviously that's like a new thing; the likely letter sort of.... says, *Hey, we would like to....* It's basically like a precursor to an admission letter. So we weren't really sure how to handle that, but we were like, "Oh, this must be good news. Let's pursue this further." So it was primarily between three places: One was Dartmouth. Another one was a school that had no fraternity or sorority system. And the other one was an in-

state institution, Indiana University, which would give me a full ride. So it was a lot of different things.

I know definitely one of the things that narrowed down my choices and made Dartmouth at the top of my list was the financial aid I received from Dartmouth was far better than from a lot of the other places where I got accepted. So, it was a tricky decision because I knew coming into Dartmouth.... I mean I didn't know the extent of the fraternity-sorority system. I'd just heard about it. And it wasn't really something I was looking for in an institution. So I wasn't sure if that would be a big deciding factor or not.

I came to Dimensions. I liked Dartmouth. I was a little bit apprehensive about it being so out of the way because, you know, if something big or very scary happened, I felt like, "Oh, we're in the middle of nowhere." You know, how am I going to get resources and people if it's so far away? But, yeah. That was kind of how I decided. I knew that I definitely wanted a change. I knew if it was up to me, I would probably go to school as close to home as possible. But I'm glad I did come to Dartmouth. But it wasn't something planned. It just sort of happened.

WOMICK: Oh, yes. And so the first time you saw campus was when you came for Dimensions?

KINI: Yeah. I came for Dimensions. And, I went to a couple of the events here and there. Met some nice people. I have to say that even after Dimensions, I wasn't um...I guess I wasn't, ...very, very fervently enthusiastic about the school. I don't think I got that way about any school, really. I thought the campus was incredibly beautiful. And the people that I did meet were really nice and really welcoming. But I wouldn't say that I was over-enthused, you know, *this is the one place I want to be, and this is where I picture myself for the next four years*. I wasn't over-enthused that way. But I did like the school, and I think the biggest selling point was the whole undergraduate teaching thing. Besides the financial aid, the fact that there was such a focus on undergraduate education was definitely one of the reasons that I really liked the idea of coming here originally.

WOMICK: Mm-hmm. Yeah. So then, did you go on a first-year trip?

KINI: Yes, I did. I'm not an athletic person by any measure of the word. Plus I do like gardening a bit, so, I chose the organic farming one,

which was fun. I didn't realize I'd have to canoe, which kind of freaked me out. But, yeah. I did the organic farming trip. That was really fun. I will say that it was a bit overwhelming to see the number of performances that amount from the DOC trip. Because these aren't just, you know, small skits. These are like full-scale performances. That happened both at Moosilauke, and that happened again, for the freshmen once you first come to campus. And I was just thinking, Wow! They really like the freshmen. [Laughter] That was my first reaction. They really want the freshmen to feel welcome. So, yeah, it was a nice trip. I met a lot of people... It's interesting to see now a lot of my DOC tripees that I haven't been in touch with, seeing where their paths have gone through Dartmouth.

For example, both me and one of my tripees, I think, on our DOC trip, sort of pretended to be sick at one point, sort of an acting thing, because another DOC trip was going to be coming to our camp. I find acting very fun, and this was something she enjoyed, too. And now she's a theater major. So I think, "oh, yes, I know where that all started." So I did the organic farming DOC trip, came back here. That was it. I'd say that in retrospect, DOC trips were a lot less overwhelming than orientation was.

WOMICK: Mm-hmm.

KINI: Which I guess when you're in the moment, you really don't see that. I mean, when I went to the DOC trips, I was very apprehensive about, number one, leaving my phone; so if anything goes wrong, I was kind of worried about that. And just, for one week going out into "the wilderness". Because I didn't grow up in that type of area. Although I did find out once coming here that whenever I said I was from Indiana, people generally thought I grew up on a farm ...[Laughs] which was an interesting change of perspective, I think. [Laughs.]

WOMICK: Who were your trip leaders for that?

KINI: Oh, goodness. I'll have to say I honestly don't remember their names. I do remember both of them were involved in.... Okay. I know one of them was Dan. One of them was Lucy. Lucy and Dan. I think? Yeah, I think so. [Laughter] Yeah. Lucy, she was in Rocky [Rockefeller Center]. I don't know if she was an econ or gov major. But she was very involved in Rocky. Dan, I think he was a member of I think I wanna say the a cappella group is the Cords?

WOMICK: Mm-hmm.

KINI: And he was also a member of the Ski Patrol. I want to say he was an econ major also, but I'm not positive on that. Yeah. I don't remember what years they both were.

WOMICK: That's fine. So how was orientation?

KINI: Ah...crazy. And I mean classes-wise, my parents and I had already sort of devised a plan: take the intro courses in a couple of these areas, and then do your distribs. And that would pretty much take care of me for a couple of years, in terms of planning for courses. But what was overwhelming were the clubs. I mean I was the person in high school who joined everything and anything, because I really didn't have, you know, that one specific field of interest. I liked learning about all sorts of things. And if I could learn one new thing from a club, then I felt, okay, that was worthwhile. So coming here and seeing like 300 clubs on the list...about like 30 different performing organizations, so many religious organizations, which didn't exist in my high school, and cultural organizations, and then teams. And it was a lot to inhale.

And I think that was what overwhelmed me the most, because, number one, this is prior to having any knowledge of how the quarter system works or what your class workload is going to be, which I realized played a big factor. So, you know, before all of that, I had to basically...sort of the equivalent of "tie yourself to a chair so you won't get up," you know. Don't join everything. Because I was afraid if I overcommitted myself there, I knew that, if it was something I really enjoyed, my classes would suffer. And I really didn't want to do that to myself, especially my first term.

So, I did join a couple of activities. I did START that term, Student Teachers for the Arts, which was a lot of fun. I was in Vandana my first term, the South Asian Dance Group. I want to say I was in something else, but it escapes me. But, yeah. I joined a couple of activities. I think if I had to do it over, I might have invested a little bit more time exploring the performing groups because that was definitely something that I wanted to do in college, um, more vigorously because I didn't have that opportunity in high school. But, I think once my schoolwork took over, that idea sort of drifted away. But, yeah, that was orientation for me.

WOMICK: How did freshman fall go?

KINI: Freshman fall.... Okay. I would definitely say it went a lot better because I had excellent professors my freshman fall. I would say, yeah, all three of my professors that term really gave me—they showed me all different facets of Dartmouth. And they were so supportive and so helpful, which I didn't realize was that great a boon, to have all those things happen within one term simultaneously, especially your first term. Grade-wise... I mean, obviously I could have done better. But I think it was also just getting adjusted to the whole quarter system and knowing, what were the expectations in class.

Yeah. I'd say that first term was probably one of the more balanced terms I've had at Dartmouth; because once I started to get a little more in depth with my major and with some of my other interests, that was when my time started to really disappear. That first term I would say, because I kept it to a very few small activities and I had really great professors, it was one of my better terms at Dartmouth definitely.

WOMICK: Mm-hmm. What about winter and spring?

KINI: Give me a minute. [Laughs] Winter and spring.... Wow! Okay. I'm trying to remember the classes I took... So when I initially came to Dartmouth, my parents had advised me to try for a computer science and econ double major because... I—in retrospect this might also not have been a great decision, but on a lot of my college applications, I put down “undecided,” which can be looked at in two ways: One, you can't make a decision; or two, you have a lot of interests. I was going for the second one, but obviously you can't judge how the admissions committee will look at that. So coming into Dartmouth I, still didn't really have an idea of what I wanted to major in. So they suggested, you know, Dartmouth is known for econ. And computer science will be, you know, a very practical major. So why not take the intro courses in both?

So that's what I did my freshman fall. Even though I didn't take an econ course the following term, I still really liked Rocky and wanted to stay involved. So I heard about something called the First-Year Fellows Program. So I took the Intro to Public Policy course my winter term because that's one of the prereqs for that. And I also took the second course within computer science. My third course was Chinese mythology—right, my first-year seminar.

But, yes, those were my three courses for winter term. I would say that was also a pretty good term. I definitely cut back on the extracurriculars, and I started my internship with WISP, which was a lot of fun. That was a lot of fun. Because the internship, even though it was in the computer science department, it taught me a lot about photography because it was having to do with animation and modeling lighting. So essentially what I had to do was take a bunch of pictures of an object with different shadow parameters, and then, with some assistance from a grad student, model those on a computer to see how close computer lights can mimic real-world lights. Pretty closely actually. But yeah, that's when I started my winter term.

My spring term was really cool because I got to take a course in ethnomusicology, and the subject was South Asian music. So we spent a great deal of time on Bollywood music, which is one of my all-time passions, Bollywood music and movies. So that was really cool. Oh, yeah! My freshman year I also got to see Ravi Shankar perform here, which was incredible. Made my parents very jealous. But that was a really cool thing that happened my freshman year.

Let me see, I took in the spring. I took Computer Science 23, which is now 50, which was Software Design and Implementation. Third course—what was my third course? Huh! Can't remember. Now I'm going to feel really bad if I forget. [Laughter] It wasn't religion. It was probably a distributive course. Goodness. I will have to get back to you tomorrow.

WOMICK: That's fine.

KINI: Because I honestly can't remember. But, yes, that was for my courses in the spring. Oh, God, this is going to bother me now. But, yes. So I know that I had to drop out of Vandana my freshman fall, so I did primarily my WISP internship as my extracurricular. I must have done something else also. But...don't really remember very much. But, yeah, academic-wise, that was my academic life; those were my three terms.

WOMICK: Who did you spend time with your during your freshman year?

KINI: My computer. [Laughs] And that's not really an exaggeration, sadly. Because my freshman fall, that was the computer course where I had come in with a little bit of experience. So it was a little bit easier

for me to manage. Even then, I was going to the professor's office hours all the time. As I went through the other two courses, I started to get... overwhelmed with CS and how much it would eat up my time... So I—I've never really had like a group of friends. I would say the same even now. I never really hung out with like a group. Obviously it was a little bit more of a community within our building and within the freshman dorms because that's what they strive to do. But, I wouldn't say I really had a group of people that I consistently hung out with.

Part of that is because I was a CS major. Not because CS majors are antisocial or anything, but just because it takes up a lot of your time. So the time where other people, you know, would spend doing social activities and getting together, whether it was to go for parties on Frat Row or whether to grab dinner or something, I was always coding during those times. So even when I did have time to, spend with people, that group had already sort of been formed. So it's difficult to get your way in there.

That being said, I would say that I really loved what I got to do at Homecoming. I mean when I heard about Homecoming, I was kind of freaked out and like, "oh God, this is just another version of hazing." [Laughs] Because everybody's going to be running around a fire, and there are going to be people yelling at you, and it was going to be really, really crazy. Thankfully, though, there were a few other girls on my floor who shared the same apprehensions I did. So we were like, okay, we're going to stick together, and we're going to be okay. And the other cool thing was they needed people to ring the bells in Rollins Chapel during the ceremony.

And apparently—I found out later—the only time they ever opened those bells to be rung is during Homecoming. And I got to be one of the bell ringers. And that was so cool. I'm like, "okay, I get to be Quasimodo for a day." [Laughs] So I got to ring the bells. I would say it turned out a lot better than I thought it would. It was still pretty crazy, but I think one of the most comforting things was hearing from our UGA: You know if you get scared or something goes wrong, just call me or find me in my red coat in the crowd, and I'll come get you. Which was really comforting. But, I didn't really have a group, I would say my freshman year.

I mean I'm not saying that I didn't talk to people or anything. It was just... it was difficult to find a group when you're coding all the time. And I think I was probably the only CS major on like my floor. So,

every time I would come to the floor meetings, they would ask, Oh, what were your high points, what were your low points of the day? And then I was like “not yet, let me finish this coding.” I remember I came to many of our floor meetings as a freshman with my computer there, still debugging something... This makes it sound very sad. But I don’t think that in itself was something that I really was worried about my freshman year because I was doing work. So I was always busy.

WOMICK: Mm-hmm. Tell me about your sophomore year.

KINI: Wow! I should have prepared more for this. [Laughter] My sophomore year, what did I do? Okay. So freshman summer came. I did, surprisingly, get into the first year Fellows. I wasn’t expecting to because I was a computer science person by that point, because I had taken three of the courses already. So they were kind of surprised: Why would she want to do something in Rocky? You know because I was not an econ or gov person. But I surprisingly got in. So I got to do an internship over the summer for an environmental NGO in Washington, DC, which was another experience in itself. I think in terms of groups, as you were mentioning, that was where I started to feel part of a group a little bit more. Because all the First-Year Fellows had to stick together in Washington, DC. And we were always called for meetings or for the training, specific skills training. So I wouldn’t say we developed a close group of friends, but, we’re still together...

I definitely made some really good friends on that trip that I still keep in touch with who are on campus. I mean, obviously we went our separate ways. But that was a really good experience for me because... For most of the part of my freshman year, I’d say I spent the time in my dorm, coding. So I really didn’t get much of a chance to socialize with other students. So this really gave me an opportunity to do that. And it was the first time I got to be in a city by myself, and I got to do things on my own for the first time. So it was really crazy for me to think about that....

I know one big point was when I went to the International Spy Museum there, because that was one thing I really wanted to do. But I knew that some of the other students weren’t as keen, or wanted to go later. But then I thought, “wait a minute. I don’t have to wait for anyone. I can go now!” [Laughs] That notion, that I have this sense of active—activity that I can actually go and do this on my own was a big thing for me.

So that was my summer. You had asked about my sophomore year. So my sophomore year—my fall was when I started to consider pre-med seriously for the first time. I will say that my computer science class in my freshman spring did not go well because my computer crashed in the middle of my final project. So I lost a lot of my code. And I was basically struggling to play catch-up the entire term—or at least for half of the term. So at that point I was coming home to my parents saying, “I’m not really sure if I want to stick in this field.” I don’t really know if this is something I can do. So I was trying to look at my other options.

One of the things that I did—I think it was my freshman year or my sophomore year—was I took the two career inventories that the Career Services offers. And surprisingly, one of the things that came out as one of my possible strengths was medicine, which my whole life I’ve never shown much interest in. I know, unusual for an Indian, but... [Laughs] But I thought, let me give this a fair shake. I took part in the DHMC Shadowing Program my freshman fall. I took a human biology course. I was still taking a math course for my computer science courses. And another distrib, I’m pretty sure. So I was taking all of those courses my freshman fall. I’m not sure what I was doing extracurricular-wise.

Oh yeah, I think that’s when I started my radio show. Yes, I had a radio show for a brief period with... I think it’s called WDCR. I don’t know how many listeners, if any, there were. I know my parents were always listening because I told them when it would be on. [Laughs] It was a radio show where basically I took one particular theme or word or phrase and then played some of my favorite Bollywood songs and my favorite Western Oldie songs to fit that theme. So, for example, one week it was boys’ names. One week it was girls’ names. So songs that featured those things within their lyrics. That lasted for maybe four terms or so, that radio show. It depended on what my workload was like, how often it came. Originally it was weekly, then it became biweekly—meaning every two weeks, not twice a week.

So my fall those were my courses. And I think after that I came home during my Christmas break saying, “Okay, I’m interested in medicine,” which came as a shock to my parents because my whole life I was touting, “I don’t want to go near people, I don’t want to see blood or anything. I’m not good for medicine.” So it came as a shock to them when I said that I was considering it... my

sophomore winter—I'm trying to recall what happened. My sophomore winter I think was the first term where I didn't take any courses specific for my major in computer science, just to see what it would be like to have a term at Dartmouth without computer science.

I did take computer animation, though. Computer animation, was still in the computer science department, so it could count for my major if I wanted it to. It wasn't programming. It was the artistic side of computer science. And then I took Music and Science, which was taught by Michael Casey...also a computer science adjunct professor. [Laughs] That was in the music department. So I'm justifying, "okay, that's not computer science either." And then I took—oh, yes. Now I can finally remember the third class: Classics 1 or 2. It was one of their intro courses that would also help me with my distribs. So I took those courses during my winter.

Let me see, was there anything that stood out? I definitely had a lot more time on my hands that term. I could invest a lot more time into my radio show. I'm pretty sure I did a couple extracurriculars. That was when I started getting involved in the Hopkins Center. I was one of the video operators for their play Eurydice, which was really cool, because I'd never seen a play in production before. I think that term it was an eye-opener to see "Wow! The world without a CS major—I have so much more time." [Laughter] It was crazy for me to think. Animation definitely took a lot of time just revising it and making it much more precise. But it was just crazy for me to not spend hours debugging something. And it was sort of liberating in a way.

I should say also at this point that along the way I was taking my PE courses. I think my freshman fall, I took tennis. My freshman—no, my freshman fall I took Learning at Dartmouth, which counted for a PE credit. I'm glad I took that because it made it seem a lot less daunting, the whole selecting clubs and courses and everything. Then I took tennis at one point. And I took modern dance, I think, my junior year. Those were my PE's. But I digress. That was my sophomore winter.

My sophomore spring, I took algorithms, and I took Biology 11. I'm trying to recall my third course...Right, my third course was the American Sign Language Poetry Performance course, which, um, I think was probably one of the best courses I've ever taken at Dartmouth. Because almost every week we met a new ASL

performer who was possibly one of the most renowned in the country in ASL performance.

And the thing I think that was striking me so much about the whole thing was not just the fact that I always wanted to learn ASL, ever since I learned the alphabet in third grade. But also because so much of their language is semantic, and a lot of classical Indian dance and a lot of Bollywood dancing—I think partly because they want to sort of mime the lyrics because they are in Hindi—make use of gestures to get their point across. So seeing that in ASL was really cool for me. And that was a really neat class. I made a lot of friends in that class. It was sort of experimental because it was a COCO course. So it was really great for me to take that.

I took algorithms that term. Did not go as well as I'd hoped. That was the term where it was one of two turning points which made me really want to drop out of CS completely. Because in that course I got a tutor. I went for office hours. And constantly I found myself struggling. And... it didn't end well. [Laughs] At least that term didn't. So, that was a really big turning point just because it forced me to reconsider do I really want to stick in CS if this is what I'm going to be putting myself through? I also took Biology 11 because I was still sort of premed on that mindset. But I think the combination of taking those two courses and seeing where that was going to lead me was also one of the issues I had. Because I was trying to do premed and CS at the same time, which maybe some people can handle, but I know I couldn't—at least at that point.

So then sophomore summer came. This was my fourth term in a row at Dartmouth. So sophomore summer came, and it was also another one of those turning-point moments for me because that's when I took computer architecture. And as with computer architecture for many years at Dartmouth, when it's taught over the summer, it's normally taught by a postdoc or a new professor who has not taught much before.

So the particular person who taught our course that year had not taught before. He was helpful, but it was just a very difficult term for me. And I think it was also coming off of my spring term and how stressful that was, and what a blow it was to me that I had to struggle that much in it. That also carried over into the summer.

I took physics also, which was, I think, continuing on that same vein still wanting to be premed. And I think that was when I took my first

filmmaking course in documentary filmmaking, which took a lot of time. And it taught me a lot about group work. But I worked with my partners, and it was a really interesting experience. Getting to work on that film taught me a lot about editing. And I'd always, you know, wanted to do something in media or performance. So it really gave me that opportunity for one of the few times at Dartmouth. That was my sophomore year. So are we going onto junior now?

WOMICK: Yeah.

KINI: Okay. Now I've got to do this right now. So my junior year—this is what I need to do: I need to check my courses...let me see...My junior fall...I wasn't here. My fall of my sophomore year, one of the things I left out was one of the—I think she's the assistant director or the director of WISP, Kathy Weaver—had met me on the street and told me, while I was walking to one of my classes, that there was going to be some sort of conference for women in computer science. And I thought to myself, "Well, you're looking at the wrong person because I don't know if I'm staying in the field very long." [Laughs] But, I thought, okay, I can do it. I'm still in the CS department, so why not? So I went for that event, and there were some senior girls there. I think I was the only one from my year who was there. Um, there was a graduate student who came from Wellesley because, you know, she would have an interesting perspective as a CS woman.

WOMICK: That was Becs, right?

KINI: That was Becs, right. Rebecca Shapiro. And there was another student who was a sociologist, interestingly, who came there. I think she might have been in the Women and Gender Studies department also. But it was a handful of students. I don't think I knew any of the other CS women there. Because I don't think any of them were from my grade level. But anyway, it was a videoconference that took place in DCAL [Dartmouth Center for the Advancement of Learning] in the library. And it was with women in Kuwait. And the interesting thing was while at Dartmouth the graduating number of CS majors who are women was 10 percent; in Kuwait at this particular university, it was 50 percent, which I didn't really see the significance of, at that point. I think the more striking thing for me was that this school was gender-segregated. I think that made more of an impact on me.

I just went into the conference saying, “okay, this is going to be half an hour, and then I’ve got to go back to the lab and start working on my assignments.” But it was really eye-opening, because I thought I was the only person struggling in CS for so long. Forget issues that some people may encounter, you know, because of gender or stereotypes or bias. I wasn’t the only one in that room who was worried about, you know, not doing well in CS—or thought themselves a bad programmer.

Because the girls I was looking at, I thought, *you’re the superstars of our department. Why are you worried about programming? I’m the one who should be worried!* But it’s interesting how insecurities bring people together closer than confidence does. I think that’s what I got out of that. Because just listening to the women from Kuwait and just from the women on our side, too, there was definitely a connection there that we could all relate to within CS, being women in CS; whether that was, you know, coding, labs, and working really late in the night. Or whether that was, you know, trying to cope with understanding something that was really difficult within your classes or developing projects, it was really eye-opening for me.

I didn’t think much of it after that point. They wanted to do a follow-up lunch after that. And now Laurel Stavis...she’s, I think, working in the provost’s office, but she was then the director of the Dartmouth AUK Exchange Program...I had no idea what that was. She attended the lunch because this has to do with Kuwait, this Kuwaiti University... “So let me hear what happened.” And we started talking about our experiences. And she noticed that I was a junior and that I wouldn’t be on in the fall. So she said, “You should apply for our program.” And I said, “But I don’t know Arabic.”

Because you see the thing is, this program, as I found out later, is targeted towards people who are either studying Arabic, want to work in the Middle East, are AMES [Asian and Middle Eastern Studies] or AMELL [Asian and Middle Eastern Languages and Literature]—I think that’s the way you pronounce it—majors. And I was none of those by any stretch of the imagination. [Laughs] So I’m like, “okay, I’ll apply.” I really wasn’t quite confident that I would get it because I’m like, “I have no experience in this at all.” But, surprisingly, I did. Which was shocking for me because they’d never had a computer science major working there before. So that was what I did my junior fall. I went to Kuwait.

And to contrast with your questions about community and, you know, being part of a group, I went to Kuwait alone. They send only one student per term to Kuwait. So my parents were worried out of their minds; especially because my dad, before he came to the US, for his undergraduate he studied engineering. So he got an engineering job in Kuwait for two years. Had no plans to come to the US until some people he met in Kuwait convinced him to try and come and study in the US. Um, so he had memories of Kuwait—good and bad—that were coloring his image of Kuwait. And, well, my mom worries all the time. And that, coupled with the fact that our grandparents were staying with us, didn't help either.

So the whole family was worrying: We're sending her off to this crazy place. She doesn't know the language, and she's going alone. Surprisingly, my dad was very supportive. He said, "You know this is the first time she's coming to us, you know, with something that she really wants to do and definitively. Let's go with it." So I think probably until the week that I left, they were checking the papers to see if there were any riots or protests or anything that could possibly go wrong there. Because Kuwait is like this small, tiny semi-stable country within the Middle East. I don't think that really dawned on me until after I went there.

But I went there, and I just loved it. It was great. I got to have so many different placements. I worked in the IT Department. I worked with the same professor who did the Women in Computing research. He's actually coming back to campus, to Dartmouth, this summer. So that was really neat, to finally get to meet him and just have discussions with him about the project. And I got to work in the Writing Center. I got to help students with their writing. And the director of the Writing Center was teaching a class in Asian-American literature. So he gave me the texts dealing with Indian-Americans, and I got to speak to the class about that. It was an amazing experience because it wasn't, and I think I said this before when I had to speak at various forums on campus about my experience: it really gave me an acceptance of my identity I'd never had before.

So growing up in Indiana and being Indian-American was definitely something that for most of my life set me apart from everyone. In most of my classes of 20, 30 students in elementary school and then as you go to middle school, I was probably the only Indian kid. When I got to middle school, high school, maybe there were three or four in my grade. So being Indian was something that always set

me apart, unless I was within the Indian community. So a lot of things that I did, I wouldn't say culturally, I mean there were definitely differences, you know, with holidays and things like that.

But I think what set me apart the most was media. I think that when I was maybe eight years old, that was when I really started getting interested in Bollywood movies. Until then I absolutely despised them. A lot of the Indian media I could see would always be seen as kind of strange. And coupled with that, growing up, a lot of media I consumed was British, oddly enough. Because parents...they want to impart anything that they grew up with to their children, to see if they like it. You know: "I grew up with this. You should enjoy this, too." And obviously, all of the English media that they consumed was British because they grew up in India. So I don't know if this happens with a lot of Indian families, but I know for me at least, I consumed a lot of British television shows. I read a lot of British books, Enid Blyton children's books—she's one of my favorite authors. It was definitely something that set me apart. And coupled with that, I have a very interesting personality.

For example, I think it was in the fifth grade when the whole Pokemon fad started. I was adamantly against Pokemon [laughs] in my fifth-grade class. And that was, I think, partly because my parents had described the word to me about what a "fad" was at that age. And I don't know why. I still do this for quite a lot of things, but I don't know why. I was really advocating for my opinion: "This is just a fad! This will go away in a few years. Don't waste your money on these comics, on these things!" And this was me...at ten. So that was weird in your class when you care this much about not wanting to be part of mainstream. That wasn't the first time it happened, either. It happened quite a lot. And I would always be a little bit different. Always a little bit different growing up. But again, I digress. Back to the point: Kuwait.

So I guess the main point about Kuwait was in the US I would always be too Indian to be American. And even now I notice, Asians aren't really considered part of the American mainstream as yet. But that's just a general observation within media. Like Eastern culture is still considered very separate from Western. So even though there's a big Asian-American population, that's still not considered part of mainstream American culture yet.

But in the US I was too Indian to be American. In India whenever I would visit people, I would be too American to be Indian. When I

went to Kuwait, I could be both, which was really cool for the first time. Because I would talk to these students, and they would know what Bollywood was. They would know what these films were. And they would be interested in talking to me.

I would go to the Writing Center.... And I recall one of the students particularly who had seen me work there for several weeks, maybe three or four by this point, walked in and said, "Hey, Shloka, you know, you've really got to stop this." And I said, "Stop what?" She's like, "You're fitting in too much around here. You're supposed to be the American, the outside perspective!" [Laughs.] And it was pretty cool because I would walk around, and people wouldn't really recognize my background right off the bat. Indians definitely did. But Kuwaitis didn't really. They weren't sure if I was part Arabic or if I wasn't Arabic or if I was Indian. Students weren't sure if I was staff, student, or professor. It was pretty weird the first time somebody said, "Oh, are you a new professor here?" [Laughter]...if you want to think that, go on right ahead! It was really cool.

And another great experience for me was I finally, I think for the first time at Dartmouth, really significantly brought music back into my daily routine. In Kuwait, I could take part in extra activities if I wanted. And one of the ones I chose to do was to be a teaching assistant for the guitar classes there, for both the all-female and all-male sections. And it was really cool to finally be able to teach people about something that I love: teach people about guitar. And to finally see so many girls taking an interest in guitar, because growing up I was the only girl in my blues band, only girl in my guitar classes. And, my brother being there helped, when he became a little bit older and started to take those classes, too, and was in the band, too. But I was still the only girl in all those situations. So it was really great to be able to impart that knowledge to people. So that was my junior fall. I'll speed it up.

My junior winter I decided to retake the courses that caused me so much difficulty in computer science. Because after hearing what reasons drove women out of computing, it was then that I realized I have a decision to make: I can be a statistic or I can stick with this. Because I might not be good at this, I might not end up with the GPA I wanted, I might not have time to do the things that I really like. But this is one thing I want to conquer. I want to conquer CS, not for anybody else but for myself. And whatever the outcome, walking out of here with a degree that says I majored in computer science would be the coolest thing to ever happen to me. So I went

back. I retook some of those courses. I balanced my course load a bit more so that I would be able to manage those courses when I retook them. So I retook algorithms in the winter. And that was also when I took my first course with Mary Flanagan, which, you, Cally, were also present in that course. That was really cool because it was one of the few times I got to program outside of the department. I got to program a Kinect Device. It got me interested in HCI.

The spring term I retook Computer Architecture. I also took the Game Design Workshop with Mary. So that was really cool. And I think I was probably finished with all of my distribs by that point. After my spring term, I took that summer and worked at a startup company in Mountain View, California, called Baydin. Which worked on email productivity applications. That was really neat. It was my first job where I actually got to do some serious programming. And I think that experience really gave me some stronger programming chops to work with when I came back to Dartmouth. And also during that summer I got to stay with a family in Sunnyvale. I was renting a room from them. And the woman, she had an eight-year-old daughter who I adored! She was the sweetest thing. And I got to teach her about animation. It was funny because she reminded me so much of myself. So we really, really bonded during that time, too. It was great.

I came back to Dartmouth. My fall term of my senior year, I took four courses. One was in Media Studies: Broadcast Journalism. Two of them, I think—no, three of them were in CS, which was crazy. One of them was my thesis. One of them was bioinformatics, one of my applied courses. And another course was a graduate seminar called Writing and Evaluating Technical Papers for Computer Science, which was a really great class. I'm glad I took it because it taught me a lot about technical writing, and it also taught me a lot about how research works within the computer science community, which was really helpful for me. Now that I have this up here, I can say, those courses I forgot: Spanish. That's what I took my freshman spring and my sophomore fall; I took Spanish. And then...yeah, I got the rest.

Oh yes, I took Acting 1 my winter term of my junior year, which was great. Brought back performance in my life. Made a lot of friends in that class, learned a lot. My spring term I also took Writing and Speaking for Public Policy...of my junior year, which I got to take with the same professor who taught my Writing 5 class, which was

really great. My winter term I took a computational linguistics course, which unfortunately did not count for my major. But it was another cool field of computer science I could explore. My thesis again. And then I took an independent study with Mary Flanagan. I was able to make a film and do some game development. And then we're to this term.

WOMICK: Where are we in terms of absolute time? I can't see.

KINI: This one's 52. Oh, like...

WOMICK: Okay.

KINI: Yeah.

WOMICK: So I guess just quickly.... [Laughter]

KINI: I talk too much.

WOMICK: No, that's good. Let's just do some overarching questions before we finish up. Updating your perspective on some things about Dartmouth. Would you say that there is such a thing as the "Dartmouth community"? And if so, who is a part of it?

KINI: Sure. Also if you need me to stay a few minutes longer, I'm fine. But the Dartmouth community... That's a very packed term. There's no one singular Dartmouth community. There are many. And I can say that because part of the reason I think I come from a unique vantage point is because I'm not part of any particular group on campus. So I've sort of moved in and out of these various communities during my time here. With the exception of Dartmouth's fraternity/sorority system. I mean I have my own opinions on it. But I really can't speak for it at all, and I'm not going to try to. Because I've never been a part of that community. I have not really interacted with that community at all. I've heard opinions and accounts from various people I've met on campus. But I haven't personally experienced it. So I can't say if it's good or bad or both. So I'm going to leave that to sit there.

But I will say that Dartmouth's cultural communities definitely siphon themselves off. For example, one community that I'm fairly involved in is the one surrounding Shanti, which is the student Hindu organization. I know quite a lot of students there. I know several officers and professors and people who are involved there. And I

will say that community is more in tune with the community outside of Dartmouth College. I don't know if this is true for others...if they're as in tune. But I know definitely that whenever there's an event regarding that organization, there are a lot of people from the community who come. There are a lot of people from the community who are involved. So that in itself is a subsection, I would say, of the Dartmouth community. And I think that's the case with, any religious organization. Those are sections. Then you can also expand that to racial communities or cultural communities. Because I will say that one thing I've noticed...you know these groups, they siphon themselves off into different facets. But collectively they do form a Dartmouth community. They're different pieces of the puzzle, if that makes sense. They're all pieces of the puzzle that fit together to create Dartmouth.

WOMICK: Okay. How would you say Dartmouth has changed during your time here?

KINI: Like physically? Or, people-wise? or— Well, lots of things have changed. Um, chief among them being that, like, half the buildings here don't even look like they did my freshman year. I mean Food Court's changed. Collis has changed. Hanover Inn has changed. Blitz is gone! [Laughter] Oh my God! Blitz is gone. So many things have changed at Dartmouth. I will say since my freshman year it's definitely changed. I know my freshman year advisor was somebody whose research in computers I really liked. I really wanted to work with her for the next four years. She left after that year to go to Cornell.

The ethnomusicology professor I told you about went to Washington University after my freshman year. So it's also been, sort of finding new pathways through all of this because a lot of the professors or people that I've worked with my freshman year aren't here anymore, whether that's students or professors. Let me see...

Other than that obviously we had a big administration change. I don't work enough with the Student Council or Assembly or anything to know the students per se. I know personally, I thought it was pretty cool that Jim Kim got nominated to the World Bank. But of course, there's always a small part of me that hoped he would stay for our graduation.

Um, but definitely there were administration changes. I still wonder how many of the initiatives that I heard about my freshman year

have actually taken place. I guess whether that's in terms of, you know, health, or sexual assault, or alcohol...I mean I can't speak for all of these things because these were projects I heard about, from the high-up levels or from *The D*. And you don't really hear about them again or you don't know what impact's been made. I hope they've made an impact.

I'd say a lot of facets of Dartmouth have changed. Dartmouth is constantly changing, which is one of the reasons I sometimes feel like, even though Dartmouth has a lot of traditions, I hope that those traditions will change with time. I mean some of them...they are feasible to keep. But some of them are really not feasible to keep. And those have to change with the times. Because despite tradition, Dartmouth is constantly changing. The world is changing. And just because we're living in a Dartmouth bubble, we need to move with the times, too. Yep.

WOMICK: What about you? How do you think you've changed during your time here?

KINI: Oh, completely. Well, because coming from my school system before, I mean I was heavily teased, bullied, and excluded. Didn't have that many friends. I mean I think I only had maybe one friend at a time. And constantly... A lot of my friends would move away. So I never had like one constant friend, you know, through all of my years, even though I was in the same school system.

When I was in elementary school, I had to switch schools to go to a different school program in the fourth grade. So I lost a lot of my friends there. Then the same thing happened from elementary school to middle school. Middle school, around eighth grade, my friend left. I mean it was a series of events. But the result of it being, because I was studying so much and because I had very few friends, I didn't have a very active social life. I mean not to say I didn't talk to people. I did try whenever I could in school. But I never really met students outside of school. Those were like two separate domains. So coming here where school and home is sort of mashed into one, was very odd for me.

So socially, I mean I didn't really have a group or anything, like I said. And I mean that never really bothered me before. But after all a while you wonder about how you build up a support network and how you build in that time into your life. Because I never had to build in that time in my life before. Now it was something I actually

effectively made an effort to do. And I'd say there were several, in my mind, initiatives I took to sort of make my active life a little bit more social. So I definitely see that was a big thing.

My advocacy, I think, for.... I don't know if it's women's rights. I mean I've always been an advocate for women's rights. But I've never been as actively involved as I am now with at least the Women in Computing Initiative. And the Women in Computer Science Club that I helped create. So that's definitely one thing. I've definitely seen the worth of my persistence now after having gone through computer science. Because I never imagined that this was how things would turn out. But I'm glad that I've learned a lot more about myself in the process.

And I guess encountering different facets of the Dartmouth community has made me more aware of myself than anything else in terms of what I value and what I consider to be good about myself. And in general, to be less judgmental about people. Because from all of the people I've met at Dartmouth, they've all been wonderful. And, I think up 'til maybe high school, I would always have a lot in common with the people that I would deal with on a daily basis. But now you meet people from all different walks of life, from all different experiences. And you know, when you're overwhelmed that much—with so much diversity, you love to categorize and classify people because that's easier to understand in your brain. But to be much more accepting of people and to be much more open to people, that's definitely one thing that's changed about me.

WOMICK: Looking ahead, how do you see yourself being involved with Dartmouth after graduation?

KINI: Sorry. I didn't understand the question.

WOMICK: How do you see yourself being involved with Dartmouth after graduation?

KINI: Hmm. That's a good question. Well, I will be staying pretty close by. I mean I'm working in Boston after graduation for a few years. I don't know what's going to happen after that. But definitely will try to come to reunions if it's feasible. [Laughs] I will try to stay in touch with as many Dartmouth friends that I have as possible. And of course social networking helps with that, especially because people are going off in so many different directions. But, I don't think I know

enough about the alumni community yet to see what that really involves. But I hope to continue to be supportive of Dartmouth. And if I do well in my life, which I hope, then I would definitely want to give some of that back to Dartmouth.

Because there's definitely so much potential for Dartmouth, whether it's to change or to make it a more welcoming community or you know, to draw students. Because there's—despite so many of the things that have been going on in the news, whether locally or nationally, there's a lot of good in Dartmouth, too. And despite the media representation of Dartmouth like *Animal House* and the fraternity life, there's an entire other side to Dartmouth that you don't see until you come here, which I really think should be brought out more.

WOMICK: Is there anything we haven't talked about yet that you would like to cover before the machine's gone?

KINI: I don't think so unless there's any questions you have. [Laughs]

WOMICK: Just anything, you know, if there's anything you want on the record for history.

KINI: Oh, wow! That's a big deal. [Laughs] Uh... I don't really think there is anything. I mean the difficult thing to say about Dartmouth in the larger context is it is always changing. I mean...somebody may have a great experience. Somebody may have a bad experience. But that might just be because the professor that you loved wasn't there when another person comes to Dartmouth. So it's constantly changing. I mean I don't think even I was—in high school—fervently behind an institution, having all of this pride in my institution. And I suppose that's just because maybe I'm a little bit too realistic looking at things, seeing the whole picture. Because, you know, no school's perfect. And I think, in light of recent events, that has been made amply clear by both the administration and the students. But, the fact that people care...I'm hoping will make a difference in the community.

Speaking personally, I've really enjoyed my time at Dartmouth just because it has been a great process in self-reflection. It has helped me grow so much...not just going to school far away from home. But just meeting new people and having new experiences. And definitely I've picked up some coding along the way, which is good.

For jobs. [Laughter] I don't think there's that much else unless you have more questions about my time before Dartmouth.

WOMICK: Okay, well that's good. Thank you.

KINI: Thank you.

[End of Interview]