

DAMYANTI “RANI” GUPTA

Damyanti “Rani” Gupta was born on May 10th, 1942 in a small town in British India. One of the bloodiest partitions in the history of the world took place in her country. In 1947, the British had finally left India, which led to a division of the country into India and Pakistan. The area where her family lived became Pakistan, but it didn’t happen easily. There were riots everywhere, and, when she was 5, her family had to flee in the middle of the night to the coastal town of Karachi. After that, they were put on cargo ships, bound for Mumbai.

Damyanti’s parents had been wealthy land and shop owners, and within days they had to leave everything behind. She remembers her mother, Gopibai Hingorani, who had only completed a 4th grade education herself, telling Damyanti she was going to make sure she received something that no one could ever take away from her: an education. Despite the fact that they lived the next decade as refugees, her mother kept that promise.

It wasn’t until Damyanti was 13 that she even heard the word engineer. The Prime Minister of India [Jawaharlal Nehru] visited her small city. He said, “after 200 years of British rule, India has no industry and that we need engineers. I’m not just talking to you boys,” he added. ‘I’m also talking to you girls.’ She had found her calling. That day Damyanti went home and told her mom that she would become one of the first female engineers.

Damyanti was the first woman admitted to the engineering college that she attended in India. Not surprisingly, that came with challenges. Besides being in a male dominated culture, there wasn’t even a ladies’ room on the campus. She had to ride her bike back and forth 1 1/2 miles (each way!) to use the restroom. Within a few months, however, the Dean realized she was there to stay, so he had a ladies’ room built for her.

After receiving a bachelor’s degree in Mechanical Engineering, Damyanti moved to Düsseldorf, Germany to work. She left India on March 14, 1965 by ship and arrived in Marseille, France. She then took a train from there to Paris and a second train from Paris to Düsseldorf. While traveling from Paris to Düsseldorf, early in the morning at 2:00am, she was asked to get out of train, since she didn’t have a transit visa for Belgium. Damyanti then waited at that small train station until 8:00am and took a train to Brussels to get visa.

Damyanti worked in Germany until January 1966. On January 24, 1966 she was supposed to travel to New York by Air India, but the flight before hers crashed into Mont Blanc France, before reaching Düsseldorf. At the airport, they provided her with a taxi to the Cologne airport with a ticket to New York with Lufthansa Air. Damyanti finally reached New York several hours later after many hours of traveling. From New York, Damyanti traveled to Stillwater, Oklahoma where she earned a Master’s degree in Mechanical Engineering. Once again, she was the first female engineer to graduate from OSU. After graduating in January 1967, she took a train directly for Dearborn, Michigan for her dream job.

At 19, she came across a biography of Henry [Ford](#), and started dreaming about one day working for the company he had built. After finishing college in India, Damyanti’s parents gave her their lifetime savings to help her fulfill her dream. It was hard on the whole family, but her mother was a visionary. She thought if one child gets educated, it would change the whole family’s fortune. She was right. Eventually, she was able to help her three younger siblings and parents come to America.

She arrived in the Motor City, Detroit, Mich., in January of 1967 without snow boots, a warm jacket, or a car. The first time she applied to Ford, she wasn’t hired, but didn’t give up. When Damyanti tried again a few months later, the HR person was confused. He looked at her resume and said, “You’re applying for an engineering job, but we have no females here.” She told him, “I’m here, and unless you hire me, you’ll never have any.” It



worked. Damyanti became the first female with a Masters in Engineering ever hired by the Ford Motor Company.

While arranged marriages were still very common at that time, Damyanti actually met her future husband, Subhash, in the United States. It was what they call “a love marriage.” That was after she had landed her dream job. During her first pregnancy, her boss told her that she shouldn’t be working if she was showing. She returned to another position at Ford shortly after giving birth and was promoted within three months. The Gupta’s have two sons, Sanjay and Suneel, who have achieved their own tremendous success. Sanjay is a practicing neurosurgeon and Chief Medical Correspondent for CNN. Suneel is a lawyer and MBA and is presently running for U.S. Congress.

Damyanti and Subhash have five granddaughters. She’ll never dictate what they should be, as long as they work hard, have passion and realize they can also one day be a “first.”

Gupta is retired from Ford and lives in Fort Myers, Fla. She and her husband play a lot of bridge, sing karaoke, and travel together.