

## Chapter Five

### **Houston**

We arrived in Houston in early March 1995. I drove out from California and arrived about two days before Kalpana. After completing some work at Ames Research Center, she flew from San Francisco. The moving truck showed up shortly thereafter, which meant at least a few days of unpacking and arranging before the house assumed some sense of order.

Returning to Texas after having spent the past 10 years in two of the most beautiful, educated, and progressive areas of the United States was not something I particularly looked forward to. In fact, when we left Texas in 1984 neither of us ever wanted to live there again — but here we were, so we had to make the best of it. Kalpana was caught up in the excitement of her new astronaut career and could not have cared less where she had to live. For much of the following year, she and her classmates traveled to and trained at various NASA and military centers around the country.

Houston is quite an international city, a center of the world's oil industry and one of the United States' major ports. It has a well-developed infrastructure, decent universities, and an unstoppable entrepreneurial tradition. Its main negative is the climate, which is hot, humid, and wearily oppressive for six months of the year. Houston was described by Texas writer Molly Ivins as "Los Angeles with the climate of Calcutta".

The first settlers along the Gulf Coast, which includes Houston, deserve great admiration and credit for their perseverance and fortitude in taming the swamps before the era of air conditioning. For us, however, and others in Kalpana's class who had previously lived in areas of the country with more humane weather, adjustment to Houston's climate was drawn out and unpleasant. Eventually, one got used to it, though the idea of outdoor activities on a summer afternoon never did hold much appeal all the time we were there. A paradox of living in Houston is the sight of people carrying jackets or sweaters when outside during the summer. Air conditioners are excessively effective and often chill buildings to near arctic levels.