

Errol and Delphine Francis

Uganda Collection Oral History Project: Memories of Uganda

Errol Francis: “For us life was wonderful, always. We had a great quality of life and maybe a lower standard of living. Because a lot of people who don’t go through that don’t understand the difference, when I say quality of life, we went to work at eight thirty and had home help so you’d have a nice leisurely breakfast; go to work at eight thirty and have a coffee break at ten thirty; go home for lunch and have a three-course meal, maybe have a little siesta; go back to work at two o’clock; come home at four thirty, five; have a cup of tea and go to the club, either play cricket or hockey, field hockey or soccer; then maybe pop in for a beer; and then go home and have dinner. That was part of your daily life.

The weather was just unbelievable, and Uganda being at the equator but above sea level, didn’t need heating, didn’t need air conditioning, didn’t need anything. You had a lot of quality time for the family and the relatives, so from that perspective it was really great until the political instabilities caused all the issues. My dad died at an early age, he died at the age of fifty-four, so we were young. My mom brought us up to eighteen, my older brother was twenty I guess, but things worked out. I finished high school, did pre-university, we had to do A-levels there. I didn’t go on to university, I went on to work, and I was in the travel business and things were good. We got married at a young age, I think I was about twenty-three at the time, and Delphine was pregnant when trouble broke out, so we came to Canada in October of ’72.”

Delphine Francis: “Yeah mine was more or less the same. I was very fortunate that both of my parents came from abroad, my mother and my father from India, and then they came to Uganda to get jobs. They were not married at the time but met each other there and got married. I’m one of four sisters, the third of four sisters, and I was born there. Life was, as Errol mentioned, very comfortable. My first experience in Uganda was—I wanted to be a teacher and my mother was adamant that I should leave the country and go out to get international training rather than get the training at Shimoni TTC [Teacher Training College] or go to the Kyambogo [University], which were the colleges there, because the qualifications would only be recognized there. She somehow felt that there was a possibility there would be a situation where I would be in a different country and she wanted us to have that. So my sister was out for her education as a nurse. At that time, it was quite expensive to leave and go and get that education. I had a British protected passport and I gave that up because I was born in Uganda, I took up Ugandan citizenship, had a Ugandan passport. I applied for a bursary or you call it—”

Errol: “A grant.”

Delphine: “A grant to go and study and come back, but because I was not a black Ugandan, I did not have the opportunity of getting that grant so my parents sent me off. I went for three years to Edinburgh, came back, and very fortunately, they were thrilled to have me back in Uganda to teach. I did start off in an elementary school—that’s what I was trained for, to be an elementary

Errol and Delphine Francis

Uganda Collection Oral History Project: Memories of Uganda

school teacher—but they thought I was over qualified so I started teaching at the Shimoni Teacher Training College. Really, I was teaching students to become teachers. They didn't call us quite professors because I wasn't a professor, but they called us tutors. That was my job and then at that time, I met Errol, we got married, and, of course, as he's mentioned, we married young and our hope was that we would stay in Uganda for a while, enjoy the home help that we knew was very important to all young couples, and when the children get older, then we'll apply to go out. I knew at the time that teachers were well paid in Canada because when I was in Edinburgh, I did come for Expo '67 [1967 International and Universal Exposition] and visited here and did a bit of my—what they called teaching during the holidays, you had to come for a certain number of hours. I knew that I would love to come and live here but it was just too far away. I never dreamed that it would one day be my home when I left."