

Jalal Jaffer

Uganda Collection Oral History Project: Immigration

Jalal Jaffer: “’72 now. This expulsion order—Mike [Molloy] is in town, I didn’t know that. He phones me. He says, “Well, I’m here. Anything I can do for you?” I said, “Mike...” I was a Ugandan citizen, but my, what is called the renunciation certificate—at the age of twenty-one I had to renounce my British citizenship. Because I was born in Kenya, I had a British colonial status, but I applied for Ugandan citizenship immediately when it was available, but at twenty-one, I had to renounce, nobody knew about that, I didn’t know about that so I hadn’t renounced, so technically I was no longer Ugandan, I was British. When the expulsion came in, I said, “Look, I think I’ve got a British colonial passport and I’m sure I’ll be able to go to England.” England is the only place I knew other than Kampala because I stayed four years there, right? And as a student you love London, it’s a great place to be, and my wife also was educated in England, she went to Redding University, so we both studied in England, and no questions, no worries, no fears. I said, “I’m not interested really, I’ll probably end up in England.”

He says, “Jalal, here is my suggestion. Why don’t you take your Canadian visa, if you don’t use it, don’t worry, but if you want to, you’ve got it.” So I said, “That’s a wonderful insurance policy.” I said, “What do I have to do?” He said, “Look, I will consider our squash game as our interview, all you need to do is come here and get your medical.” I didn’t have to line up. He says, “When you are arriving, just phone me before you come. I’ll come and get you at the door, you don’t have to line up.” Now that’s the kind of relationship we had got to, right? So I didn’t have to go through the hassle of lining up and getting the forms and getting an interview, which a lot of people went through a lot of difficulties, and I felt badly that I was jumping the queue if you will, but it wasn’t my doing. It was jump or my life, and if I didn’t take it, it wasn’t going to go somewhere else, right? So I rationalized it.

The next day, the following day, Shamshad and I arranged that we are coming at two thirty in the afternoon, we go there, he comes and picks us up, we went to medical and got our visas. So now we had Canadian visas but we would like to go to England also. And that again—I tell you sometimes it doesn’t matter what you know, it’s who you know that matters. Because I had started playing squash—I had learned squash in England. Very few people played squash in Uganda—at the Kampala Sports Club, exclusively the whites. Now if you play squash and if you beat them, they respect you. Lo and behold, this is ’71 and a British squash team is visiting Kampala as a, just some exhibition matches. The British High Commission throws a dinner in their honour. I happen to be a member of the Uganda Squash Association Executive Committee. I was on the committee so I get invited to the British High Commission for a party for the visiting British team, and in that process I happened to strike up a conversation with one of the British officers there. I just happened to mention, I said, “I hate the idea of lining up for my visa and issuance of the passport.” I only had the Uganda passport. I didn’t have a British passport. I had British citizenship and I would like to go to England but I didn’t have a passport. He says, “Let me see what I can do.” Again, he managed to get my stuff, all I would do is, we would at Diamond Trust, we would have what is called peons who would run errands for you,

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so I would just send it with one of the peons to deliver it, and he would say, "Okay, here are the documents you need to provide," and you do. And bingo, I get my passport.

I was so, so lucky in both respects. In both countries, I could walk in, and quite frankly, we initially thought we were just going to go to London and we were going to stay there. Both of us started looking for a job. From September till November, we thought, "We're going to live here." As time went by, London started to wear thin on me, I felt so claustrophobic, I said, "Is this where I really want to live?" As time went by and I was looking for a job, I didn't quite get what I thought I might get. I started going to Canada House in Trafalgar Square and I started reading newspapers, and *Globe and Mail* was my daily reading, the *Financial Times* and so on, and I started learning and understanding politics, economics, and so on. You know it was not rocket science to say, "Let's lump London and go to Canada with our visas."