The Ugandan Asian Archive Oral History Project
An Oral History with John and Gladys Noronha

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Abstract:

John and Gladys Noronha were both expelled from Uganda in 1972 during the Asian exodus from Uganda. They both belonged to the Goan community and were in their late teens when they were forced to flee their homelands. Both John and Gladys were well integrated with Uganda and were reluctant to leave.

Both John and Gladys were Ugandan citizens and rendered stateless by President Amin’s decree. They arrived only a few weeks apart from each other in Montreal. After being reunited at the YMCA in downtown Montreal their courtship began. They spent four years in Montreal before they were married and moved to Toronto. They’ve raised both their children in Canada and have continued to be involved in various religious and community based initiatives.

The oral history explores their family histories in Uganda, their lives during the expulsion period, and finally their lives in Canada as refugees. Both John and Gladys are happily retired and are very active within the Ugandan Asian refugee community.

This oral history was conducted in John and Gladys’ home in Toronto, Ontario.
Shezan Muhammedi: “Yeah we're live, you can go ahead [with your family's history]”

John Noronha: “So basically by family history,”

Gladys Noronha: “Introduce yourself”

John: “I'm John Noronha in Toronto right now, Canada. Sixty six years old, one of the many refugees who came to Canada in September, October, November 1972. From a family history perspective, my paternal grandfather left the Indian subcontinent and went to Zanzibar in the previous century in the early 1900s. He was a veterinarian, John Emmanuel Noronha and he lived the rest of his life in Zanzibar. He passed away and was buried in Zanzibar in 1943. He had two children, my dad Joseph Noronha who was born in 1905 and lost his mother when he was six years old in 1911 and was sent back to Goa, India for schooling. Came back to Zanzibar and basically had two businesses. One was a dairy farm in a place called Mkokotoni in Zanzibar and raised his own cows etcetera. And I also found out much later that he also ran a kind of a wholesale business importing cricket bats and hockey sticks and all that but his main work was in the milk business.

In 1940, he went, he was single at the time, he went to Goa, India on a holiday. It was war time and he got stuck there in 1942. He got stuck with my mother, he got married to my mother Dorothy Noronha and they came back, the migrated to Zanzibar. So before I go further with my dad's history thereafter, my mother's side of the family her dad was a chemist also from Goa. And he went to Uganda in 1925 as a chemist and worked for the colonial government largely in Entebbe from 1925 to 1947. He never moved the family, you know, he kept the family in Goa but he would go every, they had long leaves, every four years he would go and come back. He retired in 1947 and went back to Goa where he ultimately passed away in 1963 in Goa. So meanwhile my mom and dad were in Zanzibar and when they came back my dad's farm was in a bit of a mess. His cows had got hoof and mouth or some variation of that and he decided that, on the advice of a number of people, to leave the island. He then went to Nairobi in 1943.
Shortly after my elder sister was born, who was born in Zanzibar and shortly after his dad had died, he went to Nairobi for two years, to Kisumu for two years where two of my other sister were born. And then in 1947 he was sent by then a company called Kenya Cold Storage, I think they were run by Ismailis, and was sent to Uganda to open up Uganda Cold Storage in Kampala. So they went in 1947, I was born in 1950 but shortly thereafter my dad decided to change gears. He was the chief accountant for Ugandan Transport Company which was the main bus company and as a matter of fact the offices were located right in the bus park as they call it in Kampala where all the taxis are now.

Around '56 my dad desired to work and be close to milk and cows which got the better of him. So April 1st 1956 he decided to open a milk business called Kololo Dairy. In those days basically the milk came in from Kenya it came in cans on the train and we had a little bottling place in a place called Kisimente in Kololo and sold milk. Home delivery as well as retail sales. So that was '56 when he started that and that's when we had no time left anymore because milk is 365 days a year. Every day a year, Christmas day, a lot of hard work, early mornings. My dad used to wake up at 4:30-5 in the morning. So that was something he had until 1970 when he finally closed it down.

Meanwhile my mom was a school teacher and she, I don't know where she worked in Kisumu, but I know in Kampala her first job was in the Aga Khan school in Kampala and she worked there until 1956. After that she joined the Ithna-Asheri school where she got a job of head mistresses at the Ithna-Asheri primary school in Kampala which she held until when she unfortunately got cancer and passed away in 1964. So she actually had, I think the last year and a half she was not working. She was bedridden most of the time. So that leads me to myself and like I said I was born in '50. I started school in the Aga Khan school because my mom was teaching there. I actually started very early. I started primary one there at the age of four with the resulting effect that I was always, as long as I could remember, the youngest in my class right through school sometimes by a significant amount which can be a disadvantage when you're growing up but that's ok. So I spent two and half years at the Aga Khan school.
When mom left the Aga Khan school that's when I transitioned to the Goan school the Norman Godhino school. I did my next number of years at what they call J-2, the primary leaving exam in '61, '62 I started high school at Kololo secondary school. Did the four years of O-levels. I did my O-levels in '65 and then I did my A-levels in the arts stream. After that I went to Makerere did an honours degree in geography and then got my degree in March of '71 and then I went back and did a post-graduate in education at Makerere. And then I had actually finished that in July of '72. The Uganda government paid for all my education because I was a Ugandan citizen and I was bonded for five years. I was then posted to teach in a high school in place called Bukumi which was north of Mubende in what was the lost counties areas in the old days. So sparsely populated, there were two schools. St. Joesph's high school in Bukumi which was a boys school, a boarding school and then there was a girls school across the road on another hill. Quite a few of the teachers were expatriates.

I started there on August, I guess early August of '72. Soon after that the expulsion orders came up and we were on holidays at the times. So I maybe had started working for a total of six weeks and then we were kicked. So keeping in mind that we can go back and forth whenever we want, I'll just follow the chronology and timeline here. I decided that I was not going to go and verify citizenship. I saw the lineups and I said I'm not going to stand in those. I didn't like what was happening. I also had a lot of black African friends who kind of had given us some insight into this guy Amin to some degree, they didn't believe anything. Long story short, I did decide to apply. I applied to two locations, Canada ad Australia because Australia was looking for teachers. I got my Australian, oh sorry, the another thing that I did my God mother happened to be in Montreal, five years earlier she had asked my dad to send me there to do my university but I didn't respond”

Laughter

“I didn't want to go to a cold country. Anyway, I had no intention of leaving Uganda. I was one of those who was not interested in leaving. I as a citizen, wanachi [swahili word for citizens] I
called myself there. So anyways when all this happened I made decisions quickly. We were all splitting up as a family. My elder sister had married and she had two children and her husband was one of those British Asians. He had finally got hit visa to go, like you know the quota number to go to England just when this trouble started. So they had already made plans and they were leaving. So they left during the during. My second sister actually applied to the Canadian, she did not get approved so she decided to go to India where we still had some roots obviously. My third sister, Claire, she was a teacher at Kitante high school in Kampala and she was dating a Maltese gentlemen who was also teaching there and they decided to go to Malta. So they went to Malta and got married in Malta and from there they went to Australia. And then my dad and myself, my dad's initial intimation was that “I'm not leaving but you go”. So I applied to Canada and on the fourth of October I got my visa. And I remember Nancy Degregorio, Nancy Degato was working with the Canadian mission there. She said “if you wanna go in a hurry there's a flight on Friday and Amin is giving us trouble with landing rights with the Canadian government. So if you wanna go quickly go because we don't know when the next flight will be.”

So that meant that we would be leaving a day and a half after I got my visa and I came and talked to my dad and he said “you better go”. Because my big concern was that I was bonded by the government and I hadn't gone back to the school to teach. My principle of the school said “John are you coming back?” I said, “Look my family is leaving, but arrange it, I'm coming back”. He knew I wasn't going back but I didn't want him to report it because at this time Amin had already come out with a change saying doctors, lawyers, teachers have to stay. So I didn't want to say anything. Dad said “just go”. So I went and got my tax returns done which you had to do. I met friends on the last day, people were leaving in a hurry as you know and that night when I came home my Australian visa came in”

Laughter
“But my best friend a gentlemen called Peter Fernandez he's still in Montreal. I used to sing in a band and he was the guitarist. We were going and so we left on October the sixth early in the morning. We said goodbye in a hurry and like I said there wasn't much time to say good bye. One suitcase, I'm always really happy that the one thing I remember to put in the suitcase is an album, the one I just showed you there that in a bit of disrepair right now but has some key photographs of the time. We left Uganda on that flight and I remember vividly. After two stops, Lagos and the Canary Islands we landed in Montreal. We first went to Longue Pointe in Montreal. I am still under the impression that I'm going to be staying with my God mother but that's when you know we realized that the Canadian government and the Quebec government had plans. So they were dispatching people to different places.

We were staying in Montreal and then the next day we got taken to the YMCA on Drummond Street in Montreal. I don't know who else was on the school bus with us, I know one friend Peter and another one with us James we were all in the same boat together. And the guy said “ok drop us off at Drummond street”. It was Thanksgiving Saturday he says, “stand in a line”. I said, “listen we don't have any money”. I had 100 dollars on me that I had. He said, “don't worry just go stand in the line”. So we go and stand in the line, it's probably the afternoon or evening of Thanksgiving. Peter had his guitar with him and I had mine with me and we're standing there with out big hair and everything. Now finally because all this while we had a whole bunhc of young people with us. We were having fun right from the plane ride up until this point and now it's suddenly dawning on us, you know, hey we're in this big world what are we gonna do next?

And just then we heard some voices. And around the corner, familiar voices comes Gladys, Valerie, another guy Bulla Carvalo who we knew from Entebbe and we saw them and we said “hey there's a whole bunch of Ugandan here. We've got this floor and that floor”. So you know we were happy again and excited because we knew each other. We knew each other [Gladys and John] we were not dating each other but we knew each other. So maybe I should stop at that point and you wanna talk about your family? Is that a good point to stop?”
Shezan Muhammedi: “Yeah, that's perfect. That's great.”

Gladys: “Except I don't have a lot of history on where my parents coming from or wherever they did. My dad was the oldest of ten brothers and he was born in Bangalore India and my mom is from Goa. And they got married in 1947 in Goa and then came to Africa soon after the wedding but my dad had already been, my dad was already in Uganda. So we figure, we don't really know exactly maybe”

John: “Thirties or something. Your dad was born in 1913.”

Gladys: “My dad was born in 1913”

John: “Your grandfather, your dad's dad was in Zanzibar.”

Gladys: “That's right, my dad's dad was working in Zanzibar working for cable and wireless. And so we think my dad came to Africa some time in the 1930s.”

John: “As an adult.”

Gladys: “Yeah and he had been in what they call the KAR which is King's African Rifles. It's like uh”

John: “It was a battalion that was created you know during the war time. Largely local troops so they called it the King's African Rifles. On Independence Day the King's African Rifles became the Ugandan Rifles, ok so that's how it turned out.”

Gladys: “Yeah so anyways I obviously don't know much after that. My brother was born in 1948 in Entebbe and I was born in 1950. And oh at that time, I think somewhere around”
John: “Also in Entebbe”

Gladys: “I think somewhere around 1945 my dad started working for the government”

John: “In audit”

Gladys: “In the audit department because that's when we were like transferred to different cities in Uganda. So my brother and I were born in Entebbe and then we went to Jinja and my sister was born in Jinja in 1955, Val. And finally we came to Kampala, the capital of Uganda, in 1958, I think.”

John: “Yeah cause then your brother Andy was in my class in 1957. He was sitting next to me when you guys came from either Fort Portal or Jinja.”

Gladys: “We had never been in Fort Portal. So 1957 we came to Kampala and we were there until the time we were kicked out in 1972. Unfortunately, my dad passed away in 1969. And at that time I was studying in England. My brother was away at University in Pune and my sister and my mom were at home. So after I finished by education in England, I did secretarial school, I came back to Uganda and that was in 1970.”

John: “You did high school in Kololo school”

Gladys: “Yes, I did. Norman Godinho school for elementary and then secondary school in Kololo and I graduated in 1967”

John: “You finished in December of 1967 and then you worked for”
Gladys: “I worked for a number of places before I left to go to England in 1969 and then '70s after I had been in London my dad passed away which was such a horrible blow. And I came back to Kampala in the spring of '70. So it was around April or May and then at that time because my dad was no longer living we had to give up our government quarters and we had to find our own place to live. Fortunately I started working, I first worked for Gomba Motors and I really can't remember now”

John: “Abdul Shanji”

Gladys: “Abdul Shamji was the managing director back then”

John: “He was the owner”

Gladys: “But I can't remember what year”

John: “It was before you went to England. You worked for Gomba Motors before you left”

Gladys: “And then when I came back I worked for them again. Finally I got a job with the United Nations a project of theirs called the small holders tobacco project and I worked with them until the time I left. And as it happened we actually whenever the ministers were going up because this was part of our ministry of agriculture. Any time the ministers went out we were always preparing their speeches for them.”

Shezan: “Ok, ok”

Gladys: “And this particular speech on August the ninth, right? I mean I know I typed it but there was nothing about what Amin finally came out and said. So that was something that he blurted out from the top of his head or at the moment, I don't really know. Anyway when that happened, I should just go back a little bit, like I was saying my dad came from a family of ten
brothers that were actually scatter around the world. My dad had two other brothers, no three brothers, two in Nairobi, one in Mombasa, and one other brother in Kampala who also worked with the government in the audit department. When this thing with Amin happened and there was just my mom, my sister, and myself, he came up to us and said”

John: “Your uncle”

Gladys: “My uncle said, “I think you guys need to plan your exits strategy” because the army people were not so good with young people. So around 1970 I had a cousin of mine who actually came to Toronto, she lived in Nairobi, they migrated to Toronto and she wrote to me and she said, “you know you'll do really well here. You'll get a job really quickly. We're here to support you and everything”. So when my dad had died in 1970 and things were beginning to be a little bit shaky in Kampala and in Uganda, I kind of applied to some of the different banks and institutions in Canada. They didn't actually offer me a job but they were very favourable. They said when and if you come here, come and look us up and then we'll be able to take it up from there because you are so far away. So when this thing happened in Uganda and the Canadian government came in and said we are going to be able to take so many refugees. I think I was practically one of the first ones that went there within a week or so because I had all those letter of recommendation, you know that I didn't have a job but”

John: “You also had already applied to the Canadian High Commission. In those days you had to go to Beirut. You already had an acknowledgement from Beirut before the Amin decree”

Gladys: “Oh yeah. So I had an application in and I had to go to Beirut for an interview but when the Canadian government came here, I think it was my uncle you said, “you better take these papers and show them.”
John: “If I can interrupt you know how they talk about the numbers and the papers, she bypassed that. Because she had already got the stuff so when she went in and showed them the stuff they straight away signed her up for the medicals.”

Gladys: “So you know we bypassed a lot of things and that was actually how we ended up coming to Canada on the second flight. Yeah because we waited for the date that I picked but again we basically came, my sister and me we had nothing”

John: “Your mom went too. You sent your mom too”

Gladys: “We had made arrangements for my mom to go to her family home in Goa because in my mind I knew that I didn't really know anything much about where we were going to be in Canada but I figured I had my sister to look after. Once the two of us got settled I knew I could call for my mom by which time my brother would have finished and then you know we would have a family reunification but that was not right then. So then what happened is after we came to Canada, well I have to tel you the story of Jean and George. Were you there? Did you get to meet Jean?”

Shezan: “Yeah I did get to meet them”

Gladys: “So you know I was just, I had probably just turned 22 and my sister was 17 and it was really traumatic because I really, I had been looking after my family after my dad died and I came back home. I was basically the breadwinner of the family so when we made the decision to come to Canada I thought ok now we've got bigger things I've got to think about. So we end up in Longue Pointe [military barracks where many refugees flew into in Montreal] and I had no idea that we were sleeping in these barracks and for the life of me I didn't know what was going to happen. So John talked about this other guy, Bullah who you know the three of us came. He was an engineer and he worked with the Uganda government and he left and he came on our flight. So our flight I only knew the three of us because I couldn't even remember anybody else
since I was so nervous about leaving. But the three of us because he was young enough too, we decided that somebody told us in Kampala when we were leaving that when you get to Canada don't choose to stay in the big cities because that's where everybody is. You may not be able to find a job so go to the smaller places. Build up some experience and eventually you can move wherever you want no problem.

So the three of us made a pact that we decided that we were gonna go to Calgary. So we were all set and we told my sister Val this is what we are going to do. We get into Longue Pointe sometime around midnight and of course they let you sleep and then the next morning is when they start processing your papers and everything. And of course I didn't know what the time difference was. I do remember waking up really really early in the morning thinking oh my goodness I'm late, I've missed everything. I jumped out of my bed and I looked around to see what was happening and I couldn't see anybody and I thought oh that's weird. Eventually the smell of coffee breakfast and everything and people were around and we got up and joined the queue. And they were so kind, they fed us breakfast and then all the immigration people were there and stamped your passports and then they asked you what you did and where you plan to go and whatever. And I said that all three of us were going to Canada.

And then the lady because we did study French she had seen that on the application that we had working knowledge of French. She said, 'oh you know if you stay in Quebec, we will pay, the government will pay you $52 a week to study French.' And I think it was a sixteen-week project”

John: “No, eighteen week, it was called COFI”

Gladys: “Yeah a sixteen-week thing where you become fairly fluent or whatever and then you can decide whatever”
John: “I will also indicate that they were teaching you Parisian French which made no sense but anyway that's how it was”

Gladys: “Anyway to me like both Bullah and myself grabbed at the idea. We thought we're gonna go to school and people are gonna pay us to go to school this is like a country where there must be diamonds on the street. It was just incredible”

Laughter

“So said ok we will stay and my sister was so mad at us. She kicked us under the table. “You told me we are going to Calgary. Why are we staying here?” and I said, “shhh, they're going to give us money to stay”. So the long and short of it is that we did decide to stay and so if they were then directing people to wherever it was that they were going and Mr. George Randall then was in charge of the transportation. So he saw us standing there and he came up to me and I remember him saying to me, “do you know anybody here?” and I said, “No I don't know anybody.” He said, “Not to worry, I'm going to drive you to the city and somebody there will look after you and this is my card my business card.” He said, “when you have a chance to settle down give me a call.” I took the card and I didn't know what do think about it you know everything was so new. And then you know it was October the 1st when we arrived.

John: “Correction September 30th”

Gladys: “Well September 30th but they stamped our things the next day. You know we came with our summer clothes and here was I the minis were in fashion then and here we are standing the two of us with these short skirts and that's what he went home and told his wife. That I met these two little girls, they slippers on their feet and they were like cold and freezing but at Longue Pointe they did give us one coat and boats and hats and whatever. Any way he drove us to the YMCA downtown and then they leave because he's just in charge of the
transportation. So we get in there and they register us and they show us to our rooms and then we realized that Delphine and them were ahead of us?”

John: “They were behind you guys. You were flight number two only flight number one had already come”

Gladys: “What about Amir and Moraine?”

John: “Amir and Moraine came with somebody else”

Gladys: “So we knew this one other couple that was on flight number one because you know when my dad worked with the government we had these government quarters. When he died and he had to vacate these quarters this couple that we had met finally in Montreal they took over our flat so we knew them. So when we got there they were so happy to see us and they told us “don't worry they really look after us here. Everything is going to be fine.” You know Val had her own room and I had my own room and these are like big hotels so we were really quite impressed. Then gradually we knew that there were people coming into Montreal. Everyday there was a flight that where new people were coming in. And we got to meet Delphine and Errol and we were like so excited because we're meeting so many people that we know so it really wasn't so frightful and I was going to start school.

So I think I may have landed on a Friday as well and you know it was the weekend and I think on Monday or the following Monday I was going to start that school but somewhere in between they had this big symposium where all of the CEO’s and general managers of different of various companies came in to talk to the refugees and offer their services. And what was the name of the guy from the Royal Bank?”

John: “John MacMillian? He was a personnel manager in HR at the time.”
Gladys: “And he gave me his card and he said “you go to the Royal Bank.” He said, “Give them my card.” So you know that was on a Friday or a Saturday and I went there on Monday and the lady said “ok, can you start tomorrow?” And I said, “what start work tomorrow? No way” I wanted to collect my sixteen weeks of fifty-two dollars. So I said, “well I will think about it.” And when I came back Delphine was there and I showed her what I was going to make and she said “well you know that's a lot more than $52 a week. I think you should take it.” So I did. And then I looked back at some of my papers and the Royal Bank was one of the people I had applied to before. So I knew in my mind that I was at one of the bigger banks and I was right down in Place de Ville Marie and it was such an ideal location. Actually it was for me it was really lovely because Delphine, we were much younger than them, they sort of took us under their wing, and said 'whenever we go looking for apartments you come with us because you'll stay near by us.” By that time the guys had come in.

So really it was an exciting time, you know we were twenty-two years old. We were being taken out by the Canadian government to the most beautiful things to acquaint ourselves with Thanksgiving and during Christmas. Also there was the Canorient association which was mostly from Pakistan right?

John: “Bombay and Karachi. It was a community organization the Canorient and they kind of reached out and made us all members and invited us to all their functions and helped a lot in finding jobs putting us in contact with others”

Gladys: “And just acquainting you because when you think about it when we came from Uganda we didn't know how to cook. We had to clean you know we were really blessed to have people that would do that for us. So now you had to learn to do all these things. Where you shop for groceries and they really were wonderful in how they almost led us by the hand and showed us all the different things to do. And fortunately we were young enough that all these things didn't really, you know, I think we were ready to assimilate into the society. And I'm not sure whether it's because of who we are as people or whether maybe when you're young and
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you’re much more daring. When I think about the whole situation now it scares me more than it did when I was actually going through it. So there must be something to be said about youth.

So we lived in Montreal for two years and then of course by that time I was dating John. We got married and then”

John: “All hell broke loose”

Laughter

Gladys: “Yeah”

John: “So just to jump in there our lives come together at this conference at the YMCA. We knew each other earlier here and there and oddly enough just before we left Uganda Gladys and Val had sung at a function with us with our band. You know it’s a strange world how things come but any way we meet in Montreal and the first few weeks at the YMCA was just like wow! You know every second day initially maybe every third day initially and then subsequently everyday new families were arriving because plane by plane by plane people were coming. And those that were staying on in Montreal after that night in Longue Pointe would come to the YMCA initially. And then when the YMCA was full they went to the Queen’s Hotel which was further and we knew a lot of the people. Even if you didn’t know them immediately because you were in such close quarters and you shared the same background and you were in the same boat you got to know them pretty quickly. And so that is how we initially spent time there.

The general theory we had was that once you get a job then we’ll look for accommodation and move out. So that’s how we kinda geared it up and what we decided as a small group of us that really knew each other quite well, Errol, Francis, and Delphine. Errol and I were in school together in primary school we were in the same year and then he went to another school. His
other brother Tom was at Makerere university and we actually shared a room together. Errol and myself we played cricket for the same so we knew each other quite well. Delphine used to be, again she used to be in our school. She used to be in my elder sister's class so we knew the family quite well. They just got married in '71 I think and we all went to the wedding. Delphine was very pregnant at the time when we got here.

And then there was Gladys and Valerie and Bullah they guy Tony. He was a year ahead of me in school he had gone to Nairobi for school. I didn't know him that well at the time but we got to know each other really well after that. My friend Peter I mentioned and Jane. So what we decided what to do when it came down to looking for places to live we found these apartments in St. Laurent in Montreal and Errol and Delphine were taking one apartment and their mother had joined them. Just adjacent to it she had taken a unit, she and her sister Gladys and Val and then the three guys and myself we said we'll share an apartment. So basically one bedroom but you know you had a double beds and you had”

Gladys: “There were two single beds and then you guys had double beds? Oh wow, we had two single beds.”

John: “And then you have the fold away beds so we started off there right next to each other. And we had already began warming up a bit Gladys and myself shall we say. And so there were more people and we would get together. I went to the French immersion thing. Actually part of that group were the Viranis. You know Arif’s parents [the member for parliament Arif Virani]”

Shezan: “Oh yeah Arif’s parents”

John: “You know Lutif and uh his wife Sully we used to all go to the YMCA together a whole bunch of us on Brock Avenue. Learn French and play volleyball and a lot of other things and generally get to know the place. Gladys had already started working of course. Four guys staying together our overheads are very low, it was nothing fancy where we were staying. And
then I got a job with a company called handy. I was a teacher and I took my papers in. They got acknowledged actually and I got my full equivalency and I actually got a license to teach with the Baldwin-Cartier school board in the west island. Supply teaching was what they called it and back home the concept of supply teaching was not prevalent. So when they said supply teaching west island Montreal back then there wasn't even proper transportation to the west island you needed a car or something else. And I said to myself I'm going to be here they're gonna call me on the snowiest days and I need income.

So I parked that and I just gotta get a job. I'll do whatever it takes. I ended up with something using one of these guys at the Canorient with a guy that used wot work for a company called Handy Andy in Montreal. Handy Andy is a smaller version of Canadian Tire basically automotive things and it was a Jewish family that controlled it. They had their head office near the Decarie circle in Montreal and they had stores all across Quebec. Just think of a Canadian Tire and so this guy Mervin Menaisis used to work there in their systems IT section in those days there were a lot of tapes. And he said, “I'll get you in. I've brought in some of our guys in there. Everybody starts in the mail room and then you go from there.” I said, “Fine, anything to get a steady paycheck.”

So I go there and the mail room function was under the controller or the chief accounting guy who was a guy called Fred Susack who was originally from Pakistan. He was a Goan guy too from Karachi. I remember he used to have a pipe and he said “we're gonna start you in there but you'll move.” It was $70 a week working in the mail room. Basically handling all the mail that was going all across Quebec. Now Handy Andy had a credit card system that was very similar to Canadian Tire. Six weeks later the manager of the credit card department a guy by the name of Mr. Kats passed away. So they called me in and said “listen they're moving people up in the mail department so we're going to move you into there as a credit card clerk, how would you like that?” I said, “anything to get out of that paper mill.”
So I went into the credit card department and it was a very tight nit group of about four or five of us. There was a Morrocan gentlement who was promoted David Azole and I got promoted. So I started getting familiar with the whole concept of credit. We learned to do everything from taking applications, processing them, authorizing over the phone, preparing all the mailing because everything was manual back then. So everybody learned all the cycles. So I kind of liked it and they said “by the way we'll give you a five dollar increase a week and every so often you will work a Saturday and every time you work a Saturday you get a Monday off. You'll have to work late one day a week either a Thursday or a Friday but when you work late you'll get dinner paid for.”

So I got into that thing and basically three things happened there. First of all I got an interest in this whole credit piece and I understood how it worked. The second thing that happened because most of their clients were in Quebec, in Montreal you could get away with English but all these stores in Chicoutimi, Aylmer, in what you call it, in Quebec city they were all French speaking. So the store would call and they would say “hey this guy here would like to apply for a credit card in store” and you would take that application in French. Then you had to check with the credit bureau. So I learned how to work in French through there. I really got to the point where I was completely, I didn't have to translate anymore. It did help that you had forms you were filling out and you knew exactly what to ask but you still had to be able to converse.

So I worked there for a while and it was a steady job. The guys were there but obviously I'm keeping my eye open on other things and Gladys was working in the Royal Bank and she said to me “why don't you talk to somebody at the bank?” So I got to meet the same person that had hired them John Macmillian. He buy this time had risen to Vice-President. So he sat me down and I said “listen this is what interests me. Finance and the like interests me. And he says “you know, you say you can work in French and I just want to tell you something.” No he said, “have you been to Toronto?” And I said I had been to Toronto for one weekend for a field hockey tournament. He said “go to Toronto for a week. See what it's like for a job and then come back
and still think if you want to keep working here.” He says “you may learn French but as you get further in business its get more complicated in terms of the quality.”

Any way so the long and short was that I came to Toronto and I stayed with a family that we are very very good friends with. The Maserena family that used to be at airways in Kampala and stayed with them and got three jobs and went back and I said, this is may of 1974, I said “I'm moving”. I finally got a job with a collections agency FEFCA Financial collection agencies. I really used that as a moving job. We got engaged in Montreal in May of 1974. Gladys was still in Montreal and I moved here [Toronto] in that summer and drove to Montreal every weekend and we got married in September in Montreal. And just before I did three months at the collection agency but I knew that wasn't what I wanted to do. Through them I got a job at a finance company, back then which was called Canadian Acceptance Corporation. I got in there as a loans officer just before we got married actually, about a month before. So we didn't really have much time to have a honeymoon. They gave me four days off.

But any way we got married, Gladys moved to Toronto. She got a transfer with the Royal Bank. I stayed with CAC until about early '76 and in the mean time I started noticing that every time I got a raise she got two raises. I said “there's something good about this company.” So I pursued the Royal Bank thing and actually at the same time they were looking for a loans officer. At the time they were looking to get into consumer loans, the banks were and moving away from finance companies since they knew that the finance companies has the market share. So in early '76 I got an interview and I was hired on the 29th of March 1976 and joined Royal Bank and forty years and two days later I retired.

So that's how we landed and where we were. We lived initially in Etobicoke for two years in an apartment and then we bought a home in Mississauga first on Clarkson in '76. We had Tammy in '78, September '78 and then we moved here in '88. So we've been in Mississauga since 1976 by and large. Along the way we got involved in quite a few things. I got very involved with the Goan community here. After not being a member after many years I became a member in 1982
and I was very quickly in the committee. I was committee member, general secretary for two years, vice-president for two years, took a break for two years, and then I was president for two years. So 1989-90 I was very busy during this time. I also served on the sub-committee on the police forces in Toronto. It was a hectic time when we were young. I played field hockey in Toronto in the '70s for an Anglo-Indian club called the Cross Sticks and in the early '80s I stopped. And then what else did we do? You know, put our lives together, stone by stone at the time.

Gladys largely worked downtown. She was in staff training and then all elements of human resources. I was usually in a branch environment and commercial environment and then I got into commercial banking in the early '80s and did that role for various levels for a number of years until I decided time to look at head office. Then I went to head office for a while and managed the banks recruitment. In fact I used to go to all the universities including Carleton to recruit and then finally my last stint was coming back to manage commercial units in Toronto.

Oh I just need to tell a side story here. My dad was not going to leave Uganda but I threatened to come back to Kampala from Canada. I think he decided to go back to Goa initially. He had a home there that hadn't been open for sixty or seventy years or whatever. But my maternal grandmother was there and they had a home there so he stayed with them for a little while and then he did a few things. And he arrived in Canada and I sponsored him to come to Canada about a year and a half later. He arrived the day before our wedding.”

Gladys: “Yes, in '74”

John: “1974. He was sixty eight at the time.”

Gladys: “As old as you are now”

John: “No, I'm two years older”
Gladys: “Oh yeah sorry, I'm making you older than you are”

Laughter

John: “Sixty eight at the time. We had just about moved to Toronto and he moved here with us and he stayed with us for the first little while. I said basically “dad don't worry just stay home the TV is on, da-da-da.” About a week later we come home from work and I see my dad and he's got a smile on his face and so I ask “how was your day?” He says, “good, I went downtown.” I said, “you did?” and this was from Etobicoke. I said, “how did you go downtown? He said, “oh I took the bus and the subway.” I said, “you did but how did you figure it out?” He said, “he asked so and so and figured it out.” So my dad was a very independent man and I asked “what did you do?” He said, “I went and visited the Talbots.”

The Talbots were an English father and daughter who used to be in Uganda and they used to run an opera company called Secruico a security company. I think my sister or one of my sisters worked for them for a little while so my dad knew the Talbots. They were so happy to see him and they offered him a job so he said “I got a job, starting on Monday as a security.” I said “wow, dad you sure about that it's gonna get cold?” He said “no problem.” So he worked for them and the job would take him to different sites. Westin Rosco, Campbell soup and all over the place. So for two years we stayed in Etobicoke in an apartment and it was fine because he used to take the buses and go wherever he would want and sometimes he would work at night. But then when we decided to buy a house on Clarkson in Mississauga it didn't have direct access to the subways and the buses and he said “no I'm not moving there.” He came for a while but he said, “I can't stay there.” Did you, have you ever heard of Uganda House, 440 Rathburn”

Shezan: “Yeah I have”
John: “There used to be a lot of Goan families there so an apartment came up there. He was sharing it initially with a young guy who was a musician, a Goan guy, Alvin his name was. And any way he said he stayed there and was there from '76 to '80. He actually worked on the site of the Palace Pier condos when they were building them and he worked at various places. He worked until he was 75 and then in 1980 he decided to go to Australia to visit and spend some time with my sisters there once he retired. He stayed there until '83. We had a family reunion and holiday there in December of '83 and then in '84 he decided that he's gonna go back to Goa. He said he was going for six months. He took a six months return ticket, went to the house, opened up the house that we had and doing whatever he needed to do. And the day he was supposed to come back he never showed up at the airport.

Laughter

He decided he wasn't gonna go back. So he spent the next eight years of his life in Goa. He stayed on his own there. We went and saw him in the house in '87 in our ancestral home. And then fortunately or unfortunately depending on how you look at it in 1992 at the age of 87 he had a fall broke his thigh bone and died two or three days later. I always say that he was blessed that he died right away because my dad would not be one to stay bedridden and he had lived a full life. His whole full circle of life had come to a close as I knew him. I went and buried him in 1992 so that's that part of the story that we had my dad here meanwhile Glays had sponsored her brother.”


John: “Very quickly”

Gladys: “Yeah, mom came in January of 1973”

Shezan: “So she went to Goa?”
Gladys: “Yes, she went to Goa and she was in Goa until I was able to bring her here in ’73. Then my brother came in July of ’74 and then we were married September of ’74. It was really lovely for my wedding that we were reunited again as a family. Again it was really beautiful but I must go back to my story about George because I forgot about George in all this. What was really beautiful”

John: “George Randall”

Gladys: “What was really beautiful was that it must have been about six weeks or eight weeks after we had moved into our own place in St. Laurent. John said to me one day he goes, “you know that man how gave you the card?”

John: “No, no, I saw the card and asked how’s card is this?”

Gladys: “Oh God I’ve lost it in my memory. And I said, “this is the man from Longue Pointe who was looking after all of the Canadians.” And he said, “well what are you supposed to do with it?” And I said, “Oh I’m supposed to call him and tell him how we’re doing.” But anyways it took me a few days because I figured he was giving me his card and he was probably giving his card to everybody. I didn't even tell him what my name was or anything. John convinced me he said, “I think you should cal him and tell him that you have a job now, you’re working and you have this apartment and whatever.” So you know I decided maybe I should. So I called him. First of all, we come from a colonial type of environment where we are always calling people Mr. so and so right? And I’m telling John, “This Mr. Randall doesn't know my name.” He said, “It doesn't matter. Just tell him that you’re the girl from Uganda. if he gave you his card he'll probably remember.” So as soon as I called him I said, “Is this Mr. Randall?” He said, “Yes.” I said, “Oh Mr. Randall, I'm the girl” I didn't even get to finish the sentence and he said “yes, I've been waiting for you to call me.” And I thought really you’re waiting for me to call me?
So he says, “Can my wife and I come and see you tomorrow? You don't have to do anything we'll just come by.” I said, “fine.” So the next evening around six-clock him and his wife come. The two of them come up with, I remember, a bag of chips and a bottle of coke two glasses. She was holding two glasses and he was holding two glasses and in the meanwhile I had thought we would have some tea or whatever. Because in our way we do tea more than anything else. So I had gotten some tea and some little cake or whatever. He brought his thing and he poured the coke for us and everything and he was obviously looking around to see what I had.

So the apartment that we had came furnished but basically it had two beds, a dining table, and there was no living room furniture. Oh there was a couch. A couch and a dinner room and two chairs because if you were two that's all they gave you, two of everything. Any way so he came in and we were meeting him and it was so lovely to see him. So I asked him, I said “so Mr. Randall how did you know it was me because I didn't even tell you my name” and he said “oh because I didn't give my card to anybody else.” And I thought what? You didn't give your card to anybody else? Why me? And then many many years later he told me, he said “it was so sad to see you and your sister just standing there. You looked like my daughter but you were so cold.” To me they were all dressed in their winter stuff and he said, “I saw you standing there with this short dress, no shoes just sandals on your feet with your sister. When I asked if you knew anybody here and you said no, that was such a haunting day for me. I could not, I had to give you my card and I've been thinking about it every since because it was as if I had left my daughter somewhere.” His daughter was the same age as us but of course none of us knew that at the time. He said, “I couldn't do it. I just couldn't do it.”

Any way the next time they came to see us they brought us things because he realized that we only had two cups, two glasses, he brought us a television and radio and blankets and cups and saucers and kettles. It was so wonderful and really from having no family I then instantly had another family. And then they took us out for every event every big thing. Christmas, you know all the big functions whatever was happening in their home we were their, we were part of
their family. Then when we got married in ’74, of course by then we were really close with them because in the summer they would take us to their farms up in Alexandria and we got to meet the whole family. On his side and on his wife's side and then when we got married he did our video and you know we stayed friends for forty-four years, it's incredible. Really incredible that they were just so generous with their time and their love really for us. I just can't say enough.

You know I never realized the impact of us coming into this country and working hard and having all the things that we have now until one of my bosses put in perspective. He said to me, this man his name was Ted Berdette and he said, “I think you should consider yourself to be an amazing success.” And I would say to him “why?” He goes, “you came to this country, you didn't know anybody, you had no money.” I said, “yeah.” Then he said “you got a job in one week, you got married, you moved to Toronto. You have a husband, you brought your husband into the bank. You have children, you have a house, you have everything.” He said, “now if that isn't a success story tell me what is?” And it was only until then that I stopped to think about it. Like even I say to my children, I guess it's hard for them to believe anything because basically they've grown up having everything. And when I say to them that we came and I remember in Montreal it was so freezing cold, the winters were freezing cold. We had to walk to mass every Sunday and it was so cold like our heads were, my brains were frozen. We used to different apartment buildings on the way to just warm up a little bit and then start walking again. And then they look at us and they laugh and they probably think what you did this? Walking for your groceries. Honestly you had to carry these heavy bags so honestly I say thank you to the lord, God, Jesus for everything single thing that we have today is because of him. And by his grace and love we have what we have and then people of Canada. Like I mean honestly, I have never seen such warm people. And I think if you think about it as us being visible minorities how it must have been for them [Canadians]. You know to open their arms and their hearts and their doors to give us everything really that I think is so generous. It's such an amazing thing. Even now when I hear about the Syrian people and I think that we ought to
be doing more. I know we are doing things through our church, through our own individual things that we have but it just boggles my mind to think that we were like those Syrians and yet we should be, I don't know, that's how I feel. I think we should be going out to them and bringing them into our lives. I do know that Canada as a whole is amazing because I hear some of the Syrian stories and just like how I say, they say that the people in Canada are so friendly and so welcoming. I am so grateful for that.”

John: “One of the things we were fortunate in was, there's another story here that we need to say. So December 1983 this is eleven years later. We said let's finally make a trip to Australia, like I said I have two sisters there. One of my sisters was single at the time, well she still is technically single but she had come here on a holiday in '76 so we met. But my other sister who had gone to Malta and then on to Australia and they had two children. Similarly to us you really can't go anywhere.”

Gladys: “You're making a life for yourself and your children.”

John: “The only time you can physically go is either in the summer time and Christmas time. During Christmas time fares go through the roof and in the summer time there's a lot of stuff going on here. So we did not get to see my sister Claire who's the closest in age to me, she's three years older than me, we hadn't seen them at all since we'd left. Here I was married and you know the in-laws hadn't met each other officially so to speak so we decided to do the trip.”

Gladys: “In 1970 something?”

John: “No December '83. By this time my dad was already there. So we go down there to see my two sisters and my eldest sister in England hadn't come down but anyway we went down there and here we were with Tammy who was about four and they had two kids, Julian was about 6 months older and Michelle was about 6 months younger. So we go down there and you
know it's like after seeing each other after all this time it was just beautiful. First of all getting off of the plane at Brisbane airport and walking on the tarmac like we would have done”

Gladys: “Like how it was in Entebbe”

John: “The concept of it was the same it was just amazing with the palm trees. And Gladys' mother came with us at the time so it was just a beautiful December in Brisbane. Brisbane is a beautiful place to start with. We spent a week at a place on the Gold Coast, the surf and the sand. And then the families, the in-laws got along really well. It was good chemistry. My dad was there, the grandkids got to see him and Tammy got to see her grandad although she was probably a year and a half when we left. So it was a fun time and I remember Gladys said “John you've already got your Australian visa, let's move? Why don't we move?” You know we've got the family. I said, “no.” She says, “what?” I said, “No, I spent eleven years or whatever time it took to become Canadian.” For starters, like I said, I'm not one to move. I would have never left Uganda. I was gonna stay there. I left Montreal and came to Toronto because things happened in a certain way and I said I'm not moving again. So I wasn't going to move and she couldn't believe.

And she said, “but your sisters are here.” I said, “everything is wonderful when you go on vacation. It's always wonderful and it's even more wonderful when you're meeting family after so many years,” blah blah blah. So I said, “no, absolutely not,” and the other thing was that, just from an another observation from the perspective of integration was a little further back, especially back then. It's probably ahead now but I said “no we are not going.” We thought about it. So basically my family has been split, two sisters there and one in England, and one here. So every opportunity we get to meet we do and try to make the best of that.

So what happened on Gladys' side, Val was here with her. Milton, her boyfriend came from England. He went form Uganda to England, did his engineering at South Hampton and moved over here after the got married in '75. Things were slow here [Toronto] in the mid-70s in the
east so he was looking for a job in his line and he wasn’t getting it so they decided to go to Calgary. Bought a car and drove out to Calgary, I guess things were booming in Calgary at the time. So they moved in ’77 or ’76 Gladys?

Gladys: “’77”

John: “And meanwhile her brother Andrew, Andy who was also working here with Prudential insurance and mom was with him, he wasn't married. He decided let's go out to visit them in Calgary. He does out there and meets Veronica this girl over there. He was smitten and he says I’m going. Shortly thereafter, her family moved and we were really on our own. So this is where the other family really comes in, the Mascerna family who are basically extended family to us. They Bangalorians, they were our neighbours in Uganda, my mom literally died in Mrs. Mascerna’s arms so we were very very close. We used to go to all their parties, we were always included. They were a family of six. Murial is the eldest who is four years older than me, Mervin who was next, there’s Ivan who's Gladys each, and Cynthia was the youngest and so on. So three girls and three boys. The three boys had all gotten scholarships to the states in Michigan so they all came up here. So any way when they reunited here we became like family.

So before we had Tammy every Friday we would go out, they all lived in Willowdale, we would go out to Willowdale every Friday to play volleyball. There was a whole group of us largely single but a couple of them were married. One of the couples was Prem Watsa who's a big whig and Fairfax financial. So we went there at the time. The Mascerna's household was like open house. They had six children of their own. Sometimes there were fifteen people sleeping there. Go over for volleyball, stay over for dinner, stay overnight, and stay during the day. As a matter of fact when we moved to our first house in Clarkson, after we had our baby, one day they said, “we always wondered about you guys initially whether you had a cottage because you were never here on the weekends.”
So everything that we did and everything we've been doing we did with them. So Christmas we did with them, mother's day, father's day, whichever birthdays we think to celebrate we have all done together. We were an extended family. Their home was very open, a lot of people have come and left but we stayed close. So much so that when both their parents died, Mrs. Mascerena died in '91 and Mr. Mascerena just died in April of this year [2016] on both occasions they included us in the obituary as children and our children as grandchildren and as our grandchild as a great children. That's how tight that our relationship is. So much so that it caused confusion in our community that people were saying John Noronha's mother has died? As a matter of fact one guy called up from the Ottawa area, a guy called Florence Lobo, he called his cousin here and find out about this thing because I'm sure I attended John's mother's funeral in Uganda. But any way we've been very close with them and continue to be. We just did Thanksgiving together. We do everything together so that was the void that was filled for us from a family perspective.

When I was the president of the Goan Association I had to go out to all kinds of functions. We used to go out and leave Tammy over there and come pick her up the next day. And they had young grandchildren, we were very fortunate to have them in our lives. So we had the advantage of having our direct families far enough but close enough and then we have this other family here who were like I said, we were just so close. And even though they were my neighbours and the initial contact was with me, Gladys kind of assimilated with them really well. That was another big benefit we had.

So basically along the way we've had our children the two grandchildren have grown up and now we're at the stage where we're retired. It was good for Gladys in many ways I retired because after we had Aaron she decided to stay home. She gave up her career at a tricky time I might add in '94 things were slow in Canada. It was a bit tricky to give up a job and say you know I'm going to stay home and see what happens. And as Gladys said, God's been good and luck has been on our side, we worked hard and you know at the end of the day I think to some degree you try to treat people well the best you can and they will treat you. One of the things, I
will show you the book they did for me for my retirement which is really very touching for me I think and I felt good being able to take this book as something my career has been about. But the only reason I could do that was because Gladys stayed home as I was traveling a lot and Aaron was long and so that really made it a lot easier to be out there working really hard to do what you had to do. The other thing that I always believed in was you gotta have fun at work.

I always felt that particularly when I was managing units, part of my job was to make sure that I was making it fun for people and I always felt that way strongly.

[Break to view book]

It was important for him to be happy. And I remember my sisters saying he's spending all of his pension money [on rebuilding their ancestral home in Goa]. I would say he's doing what he wants to be doing. Let him be. And I knew my dad very well because we spent a lot of time together after my mom dad. We had the milk business and I used to wake up from the time I was about twelve or thirteen I used to wake up at five in the morning for a couple of hours and then go to school and then go to the dairy in the evenings. We had a clerk in there and all this other stuff but he worked hard. But he was always like sports he was always there on the sports field to watch sports. And he would always make sure we were there and that we did things that we needed to do. It was important in many ways. So I spent a lot of time with him and I understood where he came from. He was one of those people who didn't necessarily hold back. He spoke his mind but he was very independent.

And I was truly shocked, I was really shocked because I had never seen my dad cook back home. He was working and he had no time for that and we used to have domestic servants initially and then my sisters were there too. But when he lived here he started entertaining people. I was shocked because I can't even cook. He came from a time when he observed other people doing it was a young boy and when he was a border but he could cook stuff and it was strange. And he lived on his own even at his early seventies and he didn't rely on me a lot. He would go
wherever he needed to go. And you know my dad used to always say, we used to laugh at him when he would say this as kids, and he would say in his exact terminologies, “the wander Jews will always wander about but time to come they will go back.” And we would say what the heck are you talking about with the Jews. But I realized when he died that his circle of life had completed for him. You know he had originated from Goa. Never lived there much himself. Gone to Zanzibar, Nairobi, Kisumu, Uganda, Canada, Australia, and then he goes back home. Opens up the house and dies in it. And to me that was a fulfillment of life for him and I think it was an important for him. So I was very pleased that, that was exactly what he did.

We've been very blessed in all those ways and we look at it now and this is my first retirement summer and people keeping asking us how we enjoying it? Are you fed up of each other? And Shezan we've done a lot of things together we'd go shopping together. If you asked Gladys particularly in the early days I would buy a lot of clothes for her without her even being there. So we knew each other that way and we'd never make a major purchase without talking to each other. So we spent a lot of time together so it’s amazing now that we wake up in the morning sit down and have breakfast until 11 o’clock. She'd do her Sudoku and I'd read the paper and articles that I had been keeping. We're really enjoying it and the main thing now is health and be able to help out wherever we can. We're always there for our families when they need us and to support them when they need us because you never know about life.

And so there's another number of pieces that we've embarked on. We're both very active in our church. We're Roman Catholic as you probably know. Gladys and I have been delivering, facilitating the marriage preparation program for the last thirty years, we started in '85. It's basically seven weeks of, on Thursday night, these are couples that want to get married and they have to go through this program in the Catholic Church. And you know it involves everything from communication to finance to conflict resolution to parenting to the sacrament itself, sexuality and a variety of things. And we stumbled on it accidentally in '85 and we've been doing it ever since. And we now have couples who sat in on our programs that are now
co-facilitating with us. We're actually just finishing one next week. And we've really found that it has really helped our marriage.

Two things it did, unlike all of the other things that we've done, particularly community work, which takes you away from each other and puts pressure on you. This thing we do together as a couple and we've continued doing. I did it right through even when I was president of the Goan Association, I didn't stop that at all. I just felt that it was something, we felt that it was something that was good for us. You talk about yourself we give our examples of what we've gone through. Yesterday, last, week, ten days ago, ten years ago. I sing in the choir and I've been doing that for ten years now. Gladys is involved with basically what is called the Rosary Apostolate. Basically they go into the schools and teach the kids how to pray the rosary. It's a voluntary thing, what are you now?”

Gladys: “I'm a regional director”

John: “Basically they've got three or four schools and it's all volunteers, most of them are seniors, so you have to accommodate them and they go in and that keeps her busy. And the other passion I have is”

Gladys: “G O L F”

Laughter

John: “You know golf is ok. The other passion that I have is historical stuff and keeping in touch with friends and the like. So back in '01 I was chair of a committee that organized a high school reunion. A three day extravaganza in Mississauga which had 300 and change people from around the world. And it was truly a fun group of events.”

Gladys: “He didn't sleep for the three nights”
John: “I got to give you the book. I've got the book and I have some copies and I'll give you the book for that. I had a lot of fun because I am blessed with a good memory so I can remember a lot of stuff but what was even more amazing was watching people who I knew who would sit next to each other. Sit next to each other at that time thirty years later, all of a sudden twenty minutes, thirty minutes, forty minutes later, suddenly realizing now I remember you. It was incredible! And so it was a lot of fun. It set in motion the creation of a lot of new groups. Mind you the internet was in its infancy at the time so it was a labour of love trying to find people and tell them about it. Plus to proceed with all the naysayers who were out there.”

Gladys: “And our kids had a blast.”

John: “They helped us out but the few kids that were there one of them said, “wow your high school must have been one real fun place to be.”

Gladys: “Too bad I couldn't go there”

Laughter

John: “But it was a lot of fun. There's a website now and actually I'm toying with the idea of doing another reunion next year. There's been some smaller ones. Anwer organized on in Birmingham last year. Unfortunately I couldn't make it because it conflicted with our golf trip that I had already booked down south. I do have a passion about things historical, things of the past, recording them, recollecting them. It may be a lot of useless banter but it gives me a thrill and I like doing that. Gladys is hoping that I'm going to become a really good cook in due course. I'm progressing.”

Gladys: “You are”
John: “I'm a long way from anything”

Gladys: “Actually it's fun now because he helps me in the kitchen which is really nice. Instead of doing it all alone I have a helper.”

John: “What else do we do? We have a good social group. You know we have golf groups which go south and we go as couples. Recently we went to Ottawa and we have a good social network. And like I said, I try to keep in touch with more than just our Goan community. I try to keep in touch with a lot of non-Goans as well. And the other thing we need to talk about it our trip back to Uganda in May 2012.

So I left October 6th 1972. We were hoping to go in '85. There was a trip going back and I convinced all my in-laws Val and Milton that you know let's go. It was going to be in December right Gladys?”

Gladys: “No it was in July”

John: “Right, so back in the day you had to put money down. Sorry it was in '96. Suddenly my elder sister in England had been widowed and finally told us that she's going to be going to Australia in December for Christmas and her two kids were coming down as well. And I said to Gladys, “you know what, my siblings, all four of us have never all been together since Uganda.” Three of us at a time but my elder sister would not be there or we were with her. And I said, “this would be the first Christmas together for us, all four siblings in twenty-five years. I'm pulling out of Uganda, we gotta go.” All the grandkids were also going to be there. Tammy and Aaron, all of us would be there and all the grandkids would be there. In the back of my mind I said I don't know if that will ever happen again, I don't know if we'll have all of them together again. So we made a decision and bailed out of the other trip. I convinced everybody to carry on going and they all went. We went to Australia and had that reunion. It was incredible and like I said it's been since '96 we've not been able to get everybody together.”
Gladys: “Maybe the siblings but not all the grandkids”

John: “Because now they’re all married and it becomes very difficult. Even at weddings we have not be able to have everybody. So we’re glad we did that. So anyway, fast forward that got pitched. Aaron came along and we became young parents again so a new dimension comes in. School demands and all that kind of stuff so when he went to university then the opportunity came up. They were planning a reunion in Uganda in 2012. So the group that was out there and we said we would go. I convinced my sister in Australia with the Matlese husband. They were coming with their daughter who is now getting married and then another couple from here she used to be from Uganda and then she moved to Bombay and then came here. They said they’ll come too. So we went as a group, not really as a group but we met there together. Then all of a sudden Ebola broke out and that group that was organizing that thing they pitched it. They dropped it. I was following reports from the World Health Organization and I said to our group everything is fine. I knew Mulago and Uganda enough to know that they had a far better medical situation that other parts of Africa. I was comfortable with that so we went.

Before I went I wrote to the Uganda Cricket Association. I wrote that I’m an ex-Uganda and Makerere guy and I’m coming, blah, blah, blah. I gave them six names of African guys I used to play with. I said I’d like to locate them in advance so that I know where I’m going to. And they immediately e-mailed me back and they said welcome back and they cc-ed five of the six others. Then I started getting e-mails from guys. One guy Joe Kamo said I still remember the first day when I came to Makerere and you were beating the drum and he started quoting stuff. Anyway, long story short we went there and it was incredible. I had the most fun because I could a. remember the most, b. I was the most excited, and c. all the roots that I had invested back then to get to know particularly African people was paying back in dividends. We had a great time. We also family with us and like I said people came out to meet us.
One of my old friend Harjit Mangat he's a Sikh guy and a big whig there now. He's got a beautiful home he's got built on Kololo hill. He had us all over for a big dinner for Ugandan Independence Day which just so happened to be the 50th anniversary.”

Gladys: “And John arrived in Entebbe exactly forty years to the day he left. So he left October the 6th and we were there on October 6th. It was incredible.”

John: “Actually the day we had arrived, they had put up a big sign saying Uganda is Ebola free for the last twenty-three days. It was good, we had a great. Many of my friends like Sam Wall who I met at the stadium, this guy Joe Kamu he came from Mbarara. He used to be at university with me, he was two years behind me and he came all the way from Mbarara. We were not at the hotel the day he came but he left a note saying I'm at my brother's place, call me if you can meet me tomorrow. It was incredible and you know what some of my family too and some of my friends were quite stunned by the gracious and warm welcome we were given. And then Harjit and both our families are all there and this is the interesting thing. My Sikh friend Harjit Mangat his daughter opened a bistro in Kololo right on the spot where my dad's diary used to be.”

Shezan: “No way”

John: “Can you believe it? One of our friends told us to meet them at so and so place and asked if we knew the place. I said, “I know the place really well,” even though it was forty years ago. She said “yes there's a bistro there, let's go.” So we go for lunch and I meet Martin Alager who was my dentist and he's still in Uganda. His wife was American and she was there and we met a few other people. And the next time I was there I met a guy named Mahmoud Alibhai who was a year behind me and he's got security companies in Uganda and he's from Vancouver. He sees me there and he shouts out “Noronha!” It was truly incredible because we left so quickly and we didn't have time. I didn't want to leave and now you have to leave in a hurry which is pretty
good because there was no time to be emotional. To think about the wall that used to hang around the tree you used to climb on it was all a memory.

To go back and I actually went to the spots where each one of my homes was. One of them is no longer there but it is where the Kampala Serena hotel is now. I recognize two houses that were there. The second place I lived we went to. We went to the apartments where Gladys and Val used to live in these flats on Buganda Road. We went to Kololo school and did a tour of it. We went to Makerere and to my residence which used to be called Northcoat Hall. Saw the warden who by the way happened to be a student in his first year of high school in that up country school that I was posted in. Can you imagine?

He didn't recognize me and I couldn't recognize him but he remembered that there was a Goan family in the school that used to look after the supplies and I used to eat with them the Fernandez' and he remembered them. It was incredible, it was amazing. Next time I go I'd like to take my kids. This time just the two of us went with the others but that's on the agenda next time.

Gladys: “But when you do go and you do Africa you have to do a Safari. Something you must do.”

John: “Another thing I had a chance to do at that time was that we went to Zanzibar. So for the first time because we never traveled there. I was very fortunate a man named John DeSilva who died just a year later. An incredibly knowledgeable historian about the place. I found out about him and I went to Gladys' cousins who live in Dar-es-salaam and we stayed on the east side in a resort. We also spent one night in Stone Town and he took me around to all of the places of interest in Stone Town. Things that my dad used to talk to me about. We thought my dad was bullshitting us back then. I found out that he wasn't in many cases. The number thirteen club, Alladina Visram's original apartment. Incredible, just incredible. I was so blessed to meet this man because he single handedly got UNESCO to designate Stone Town as a World Heritage Site.
He took us to the church where did the frescos. He preserved a lot of the Arab art because after the revolution they were destroying and did so at great risk to himself. His daughter is still there. We went now this year for Gladys' cousin's wedding in Dar-es-salaam so we went to Zanzibar so we met her the daughter who lives in Zanzibar.

I was really happy to go to the land where my grandfather is buried and where my dad knew so well and to spend time there. It was really really beautiful and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Time out?"

Gladys: “I think so”

John: “Any way, there's lots of other things we could talk about but I don't know where that takes us right now. We are big sports fans per se and like I said Gladys talks about my golf and I enjoy golf. And we have a big group of friends that golf so we do a lot of that. Gladys is a skilled sudoko player right?”

Gladys: “Just don't make fun of me”

Laughter

John: “I'm not making fun of you, I'm being honest. The other responsibility we have is that Gladys' mom is going to be ninety-four next month. She lives in a home very close to where we are, like four minutes away. So we have responsibility for her she's in very good physical health although you know dementia etcetera is taking over. At ninety-four why not as one would say but that's the story here from our perspective by and large.”

Shezan: “Is there anything you guys wanted to add at the end? Anything you've missed?”
John: “I'm sure we missed a lot of stuff but you know we've talked about Canada and what it's been for us. I remember at my retirement party saying you know the US may proclaim that they are the greatest country in the world but I think I came to the best country in the world. And I continue to say that best is better than greatest in my view. So we're very blessed in that way. We've been fortunate and blessed to be able to travel to a lot of places and inevitably every time that we come back from every holiday no matter how wonderful the holiday was, we are always thankful to be back home. And it is home after all. That's number one I think from our perspective. We often think back about the time lines and the time frames and how fortunate we were.

Gladys mentioned about the Syrian people, I remember when I was in recruitment at the bank interviewing a lot of people who's parents had been boat people. And I remember telling, a few cases of them telling us stories of how they escaped. I'll tell you something we had it much easier, far easier than them. We were a hot potato at the time for the British government and I think that is why, otherwise I don't think our fate would have been as good as it was so to speak. Because people forget that in 1972 there was violence of major levels in Rwanda. They were killing people. There was tribal warfare. I always also think about the 500,000 black Ugandans that Amin's regime destroyed and killed. Many of them were friends of mine. Some estimates of people from various areas and I always grieve for them because we got away. When Idi Amin passed away in '06 I think it was I was interviewed on CBC Radio on Andy Berry's show and I remember he was reciting stuff. And I said, “you know something, I'll be honest with you, when it comes to putting things on the atrocity level we are low on the totem compared to the other things that Amin has done. One of which is destroying the country at the time. It could have done really well. Uganda was a thriving country despite everything. It was a good country, it was fertile and into the early '70s coffee prices were taking off. We would have done really well but unfortunately that got destroyed when the Asian were kicked out and everything went off. So it's sad in many ways and I feel badly about that. Like I said, I knew a lot of Africans. I made it a point to know a lot of Ugandan Africans. We played together, we stayed together. And that's something I always think about but they suffered.
Another thing I will point out is that I was really happy to see when I went back this time. I wasn't expecting to see what was left, no place is like that. Yes, there was a lot of chaos and commotion and overcrowding but that's everywhere. If you look at the city of Toronto it takes an hour and a half to drive from the East end to the West end with all our highways. But what I really liked was the fact that there was a lot of commerce in motion among the local people. Every corner there's something happening which is good. And I think one thing that Amin did for the black Ugandans is got them to realize that you're going to have to work for yourself because they couldn't rely on anybody. The government was a disaster and I think that created a lot of independence in themselves which is very very important. That has probably been one of the strengths of the Asian or Indian community is that they want to work for myself which helps. So that's what I saw and take it from there. “

Shezan: “And then usually my last question is how do you guys identify yourselves today? Would you say you're Goan-Canadian, Ugandan-Canadian, no right or wrong answer just sort of your experience?”

Gladys: “I just go by Canadian because I think I've been here so long that I actually sometimes say to John, “was I really born in Uganda?” A, because I don't have any pictures, none of the pictures arrived. I had sent them with my mom to India but they were all stolen so we had no pictures of us growing up in Uganda. So you know I'm thinking was I really born there? And really I've lived here for forty-four years of my life and that's my identification.”

John: “So let me tell me what I would tell you and I like to put this in practical terms. I'm watching the Olympics.”

Gladys: “That's true”

Laughter
John: “I'm watching a race and there's a Canadian runner, a Ugandan runner, there's an Indian runner or any other runner”

Gladys: “And we say go Uganda go!”

John: “It's automatic and that's my deep emotion and that's the best way I can portray it. So I have, like I said, I consider myself that obviously I'm Canadian but I'm also pretty aware that somebody looks at me they know that I'm from somewhere else originally so they're always going to ask me”

Gladys: “And then you say, “how much time do you have?”

Laughter

John: “But gone are the days where I say I'm from Mississauga, I know what they are looking for. And I do say I'm from Uganda and they would say, “Where's that?” In the old days people didn't know where it was. I would say, “it's in Africa.” “But you don't look African?” So then I say, “you've got some more time? My roots are from India.” “Yeah but your name?” I saw, “Yeah I'm from Goa.” So that's the way it roots itself but at the end of the day we're Canadian. I consider myself if you ask me to pin it down I'd say Ugandan Canadian. I'll tell you something I went to Indian twice. The first time in '87 when I met my grandmother my mother's mother. We had a holiday and my sisters came and my dad was there. And someone said to me that when you go to Goa you just feel like you belong there. John Nazareth told me that. And I went and we had a pretty good holiday and my sister's were visiting us and I came back. In '92 I went back to bury my dad and I spent the first week getting all the funeral things all done and then I had rented a bike and I went and saw a lot of my parent's friends and their cousins and relatives. And I behaved like a tourist and I realized that I enjoyed myself most in India when I
was a tourist. When I went to Uganda there was something that came back forty years later that struck me. Which I expected would be the case.

I was like a little boy and even when I went this time to Zanzibar I mean I mixed with the people, I speak Swahili, I tease them around. So to me that's home. I don't know Goa, I never lived there, how could I know it? I don't know it. And the other thing too is because of the milk business among other things my dad broke away from the Goan Institute in Kampala in '56. I was just six years old. So the only time that I would only go there was in the years later when I was singing in the band and we would go and sing there. And I supported the Goans and I used to watch cricket and all this kind of stuff but I was never a social person. I never had that tight community mentality. My friends were everybody, I knew Ismailis, I knew Sikhs, I knew Africans, I knew this that and the other. So that was the way it is. And then the strange thing that happened when I come to Canada in '72 and there's a Goan Association here and I said, “no, I'm not becoming a member.” We were not members for eight years, ten years, I was playing field hockey with this Anglo-Indian club we'd meet with community people but we never would go to the functions. So then in '82 so eight years later John Nazareth calls me up and he says “John, a new committee is being elected for the Goan Association, how about coming on to it?” Do you know or heard of Zul Ahmed DeSouza.”

Shezan: “No I haven't met her”

John: “She used to be a teacher and an amazing field hockey player. She lives just one street over. She's gonna be the president and John was going to the vice president and he started listing the names of people I knew. “Why don't you come as a committee member?” I said, “John, I'm not even a member?” He said, “don't worry we'll nominate you, don't worry about it.” So I thought about it and what struck me was this in Uganda there was a rule at Christmas time we used to have a Christmas tree for the kids. Where we would have a Christmas tree where the kids would come and get a gift.”
Gladys: “Santa would give them all a gift”

John: “So when my dad broke away in ’56 that was the last year I remember having a, six years old, going to this thing. And I remember getting a sword and a little thing and I had fun with it. But then there were not more because we weren't members anymore. So when I belonged to this Anglo-Indian club here it was the same thing. But then when the club shut down, I remember saying to myself I don't want my daughter to feel the same way I did. So when this opportunity came up, I thought maybe we should become members. Next thing I know that year I was a committee member. At that time there was a one year mandate and the next year they made it two year mandates. The next committee was coming in and I became a general secretary. Then the next year John became the president and he got me in as vice-president for two years. And then I took a break of two years and then two years later I became president. I went from no involvement at all to total involvement to the point where it was incredible and with that you know you had to go here and you had to go there. All these little things picking away at you and so I went from one extreme to the other. Again I find myself blessed because I didn't force myself into one corner yet when I needed to be in a corner I was there. And you know I just find through diversity you get so much more. So then to me that was pretty incredible. So I think at the end of the day we kind of look at that and say, I don't know how I got on this, but it was just the notion that we belong to a common universe and when people need help you gotta help them out. Irrespective of colour and creed.

The other thing I will give credit to my dad. He was the one who was the liberal one from the perspective of believing people are all the same. Black, white, blue, anyone was welcome in our house. He was an ideal in a certain way but he did not force agendas on us and he was a bit of a maverick in many ways. The last example I'll give you, my mother died on July 27th '64, on the 28th she was buried. That weekend, it was a Monday and Tuesday, so that weekend a cricket team from Pakistan was coming to Uganda playing cricket. And I use to always love cricket and you know those days you know your mother died you keep quiet for a little while. So on the Friday, three days later, my dad says, “you going to the match?” I said, “I'm really not too
sure,” I'm only fourteen years old, “I don't think I should really go because mom died.” And he says, “would you like to go?” I said, “Yeah I would.” He said, “don't worry if people talk, you go.” And it was a great time because one of my heroes a guy called Charlie DeSouza he's a really good cricketer he really flayed Pakistan bowling in one of the innings. You know treat people universally and go from there.”

Shezan: “Thank you guys very much this was absolutely incredible”