

The Ugandan Asian Archive Oral History Project

An Oral History with Maurice Fernandez

Archives and Research Collections

Carleton University Library

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Narrator: Maurice Fernandez

Researcher: Yasmin B. Jamal

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Abstract:

Originally from Jinja, Uganda, Maurice Fernandez arrived in Canada in the fall of 1972 after the Asian expulsion from Uganda ordered by President and Military General Idi Amin.

This oral history covers Mr. Fernandez's memories from his early life in Uganda, his time studying at the University of Nairobi, and the expulsion from Uganda. Mr. Fernandez also discusses his arrival in Canada and his time working in British Columbia and the Yukon.

This oral history was conducted in the Vancouver, B.C. area with researcher Yasmin B. Jamal.

Maurice: "Okay my name is Maurice Fernandez and by background I am a Goan, my parents were from India, Goa in India which was Portuguese Indian before. My father emigrated to Uganda from a place called Soroti when he was seventeen years old and he started working there first in the railway, building the railway, then he started his business with someone else. That was when he was seventeen, so that was 1928. Then in 1947 he went to India, to Goa, and he married my mother from the same village in Goa and they came out and I was born in 1948. I'm basically the eldest of four brothers. I did my primary school and what they call grades 12 - high school - grade thirteen/fourteen. I did my primary school and elementary up until grade twelve in a town called Jinja. Then I started my high school in Kampala, I did my grade thirteen, high school, and then in grade fourteen I believe I went and finished it in a town called Mbale. What else can I tell you? Then I decided after my high school, I decided I wanted to go to university. So based on the subjects I wanted to study, I decided I was going to go and study at the University of Nairobi.

I started at the University of Nairobi in 1968 and I completed my degree in 1972. Other than that there were lots of things that took place at the university while I was there for example on the political side Kenyatta [Jomo Kenyatta, President of Kenya] was at that time was in the middle of all the uprisings. In 1968-69 there was an incident where for example, four African girls were suspended for having men in their dormitories. And because I was vice-president of the student union, I was part of the executive, we decided that we were not going to allow... we were not going to take the suspension. So we stopped, we did not go to university classes, all three thousand students. I still remember Kenyatta got very angry about that and told us that we had to go back, and we said no.

I'm giving you a little bit of background about the university, I remember on the second or third day when we were out, we refused to go for classes and we had just had lunch, I was sitting with my friends on the fourth floor of my dormitory and I was looking out the window and listening to Kenyatta on the radio. He brought up this point that he was expecting the student to go back to work right away and when I looked out the window from the dormitory, I saw that the army was around us. They came with their guns and also with their - I forget what it's called - in their hands and they started... so when I saw that we knew that Kenyatta meant business so I jumped on the balcony and from the fourth floor, forget the elevator, I came down the balcony right on the bottom floor and started running out. And when I - this will give you an idea - I was running out and it was slightly drizzling, very wet as you know Nairobi is like, and the ground was all wet. We had a couple of army guys running behind us beating up the students, African and others, Indian etcetera. These guys had nice beautiful uniforms and I didn't think they wanted to get dirty so I jumped in the dirty ditch and started running, and they wouldn't come in so I got away.

I remember that incident more because that's how I met my wife from Nairobi. I was climbing out... at the end of the ditch I was climbing out and there was barbed wire around the university and I was climbing out and went on the other side and... which was the Voice of Kenya, and that's where my wife was working, so that's how I met her. Although nothing came about it at that time, we were just friends. What else can I tell you? I graduated in '72 and went back."

Yasmin: "What did you study at the university?"

Maurice: "I studied chemistry and geology, those were my major subjects, my minor subjects were math, with a focus on the environment. After I graduated I went back to Jinja where I was based, where my parents were based, and I started working for the United Nations. That's what I was doing when I heard Idi Amin make his announcement, and when he made his announcement he also said that... and at that time because my father was a staunch nationalist, not only he but all the sons and my mother, we all had Ugandan passports. So I was considered a professional, so anyways I graduated and I was working there and he made the announcement about the ninety days. At the same time he made the announcement that it applied to certain groups of people, but not those with Ugandan passports or Ugandan citizenship, and especially not the professionals because knowing if the professionals left it would hurt the economy. So I could see that it wouldn't apply to me so I thought I could stay behind.

There were lots of... do you want me to tell you about the incident now? Okay, anyways so when I started working and my boss was an African, the head of the U.N. out there he did tell me that this didn't apply to me, but I had made up my mind that sometime down the road I would think of leaving. But as you know, I had a motor scooter, a [inaudible] or vespa or something and I had my first little car so... and I was staying in my parents house and my father said, "No, we're going to stay," etcetera. He had a business, he had a grocery business in Jinja and one in Mbale, and he also had a trucking outfit on the side. So he thought we would stay, we had our own houses, two houses so we thought we would stay. Incidentally our house was at the banks of the river Nile so you know sometimes in the evening we could sometimes see hippos coming up into the garden. They used to come up and I don't know if you know but they say that the hippos are the most dangerous animals in the world. Leaving that aside, so that's what happened.

So other than that there were a few incidents for example, not necessarily in order, but I will tell you. For example, because I was single people would come up to me and ask me to take their daughters from Jinja, through Mabira Forest to Kampala to Entebbe and put them on the plane so that they'd go to India, and we did that with a couple of girls. I'll give you one incident, that girl became a woman and she is now married and she is in Bombay. Her parents asked me to take her to Entebbe and get her on the plane. So we put her in the backseat, her father was on my right side, I believe the steering wheel was on the right, and I had another friend on the left.

We were driving out from Jinja and we had to go through the dam to hit the main road to go to Mabira Forest and Lugazi and Kampala and then Entebbe. When we were driving, just before we started we knew there would be an army roadblock at the dam. So I remember that the best way to get through was to give some money to the sergeant in charge of the army. So I gave the father who was sitting behind, I give him a fifty shilling note. I said, "When we get to the roadblock, put your window down and shake hand with the sergeant and leave fifty shillings in his hand and they'll let us through. We knew that was the way to get through, he said, "Okay." We reached the dam and there was a long lineup and when it was our turn I said to this guy, the sergeant came up and I said, "Oh, my friend behind wants to

shake your hand and he wants to be your friend.” So the sergeant knew that was the way of saying that. He came behind and I said to the father at the back, “Okay, why don’t you shake the hand of this nice sergeant?” No sound. I said, “Why don’t you shake the hand of this nice sergeant?” No sound. I turned around, and he was in shock because all the army guys had rifles and this and that, and he was so nervous and he was in shock. I put my hand in the back, took out the fifty shillings and shook hands with the sergeant, gave him the fifty shillings and he told the roadblock for the army, he says, “Let them through.” So we went through. And that was one incident that happened.

Second incident, we were taking this other girl and my friend who is now living in Kelowna and myself were driving. I was driving and he was sitting at the side. When we were driving we reached the Mabira Forest. Two days before when one of my friends - who I used to play hockey with - he was going the same way and when he reached Mabira Forest some villagers walked across the road slowly and when he stopped to let them go across the road, they stopped and beat him up and robbed him. So when I reached Mabira Forest, I was driving maybe eighty, ninety, maybe a hundred miles per hour, and the roads as you probably realize were not that broad. So when I was driving and all of a sudden there was an eight or nine year old boy, African boy walking slowly across the road, I could see him about a quarter mile ahead and I knew from the way he was walking that even though he saw the car he kept on walking. I figured by the time I reached him he would be in the middle of the road, and he wasn’t walking fast. He saw the car, I hooted my horn but he wasn't walking fast so I said, “Okay.” I carried on driving and I took my foot off the gas pedal and this young kid was in the middle of the road, so I decided I’m not stopping, so I hit him. But I turned my car in such a way that I hit him with one of my headlights on one side. I hit him so hard he went up in the air and fell behind the car. That’s how hard I hit him.

So I kept the car running, I told my friend who lives in Kelowna now, “You get out and check on him and I’ll keep the gas running.” So he got out of the car and walked to the back to see the guy, the young African boy, and he was all alive. The only thing that had happened is I had hit him on the hip and I had broken his hip, but he was alive. Just as my friend reached him, Africans with tongans came out of the bushes with stones and everything. So I still had the car running, I backed it up and kept the door running, my friend jumped in and we took off. We reached Lugazi where we stopped at the police station to report the incident, and then took off to Kampala and Entebbe and put the next girl on the plane. So those were two of the incidents.”

Yasmin: “Quite dangerous. Now on the journeys that you were doing, would it have been early mornings, afternoons, or in the evening kind of?”

Maurice: “Usually it was one hour to Kampala, half an hour to Entebbe, and the same to come back. We would time them so we that we would get there just before the plane left I think, I think the planes were leaving at about eleven or something. So we timed that so we got there half an hour before the plane left, put them on the plane and they took off to India. So maybe we’d leave about eight, eight-thirty, then come back for the next load. But that was just when we were out of university and youngsters, you know?”

Yasmin: "Lots of energy and everything."

Maurice: "Exactly. So that's what happened. A lot of incidents and my friends and family were beaten and robbed etcetera. For example I'll give you another incident. We had four... my father, even though we had a big brick house and a big fence, he never put any gates on the house. So we had two ways of coming into the house but no gates because we had four German shepherd dogs and we always had four, if one died we'd get another one. So we always had four German shepherds, big ones. What happened... those four were trained by my father to the point, number one - the dogs would only listen to the members of the family, and they would not eat from anyone's hand than ours, only the family. My father had trained them.

Giving an example, when the trouble started up with the army people etcetera we had a doctor - who actually recently died in Winnipeg - so he was our family doctor, and he was living behind us and he had one dog, one big German shepherd. A few days after that three or four people, Africans, came to his house. He and his wife were home with the dog and the Africans threw some poisoned meat. The dog ate it, died. Then they beat up these two people and robbed them and took a lot of things. We heard about that incident and two, three days later we heard the dogs barking at night. We went out, looked around and couldn't see anything. We woke up the next morning and there was poisoned meat on the road all around our house, but the dogs hadn't touched it because they were trained only we could feed them."

Yasmin: "That was really good."

Maurice: "Yeah, saved our life. That was another unfortunate thing, when we left we had to leave the dogs behind. We had four or five servants and we gave them some money, who knows if they fed them or not, but at this point..."

Yasmin: "It's really hard, so close to your pets."

Maurice: "Right. The other interesting thing - I'm not going in any order - but the other interesting thing is over the last few years when emails were coming out from the Ugandan government, because I am the eldest son and my father died in '82, but everything, my parents houses were left to my mother and as the eldest son I guess I get. So even last year I got an email saying, "Okay, are you going to be claiming this house etcetera, etcetera?" So I still have that at home. I didn't apply because at this point I figure none of the four brothers want to go back or even do anything about the houses, we're not too worried about it. So I guess the houses are still there."

Yasmin: "I think there is a representative in Uganda who can help you with selling your house. Is it only one house?"

Maurice: "Two houses."

Yasmin: "So you could talk to somebody."

Maurice: "Okay. So anyway that's part of my early life. What else can I tell you?"

Yasmin: "So that means you have not been back?"

Maurice: "I have not been back to Uganda. In 2013 I went to Kenya and Tanzania for two weeks and I also met with a couple of friends, one of them a Sikh friend of mine, he was in high school in Kampala and he became a doctor. When I went in 2013, he was the CEO of the Aga Khan hospital in Nairobi. He was doing... now he is retired and doing some volunteer work in Uganda with HIV and aids, to try and reduce that. What else can I tell you... I can tell you that when the army troubles there were different days, I was looking and identifying my two cards that I had. I still have my identity cards, and you've probably seen that. So I think at home somewhere in the house I still have my UN card which gives me - now of course it's not valid - but used to give me diplomatic immunity, I could travel anywhere in the world and no one could stop me or anything, you know United Nations.

So because we had to get all these different stamps and cards etcetera like this one, sometimes we had to stand in line. We were given three days, eighty thousand of us to get everything stamped. One incident we were standing in line, we stood the whole day and the first day nothing happened, we just moved and a couple thousand people got through. We stayed there overnight, I stayed overnight with my friends, brought some food and all and stayed in line overnight for two days to get through and get everything stamped. A few days later Amin came out again with something else that had to be stamped.

So we went to stand again in line, and actually quite interesting. The second time when I was standing in line, the incident that happened - I think it was maybe two, three weeks before we finally left - we were standing in line, I was standing on behalf of my family so that when I got there... I didn't want my parents to stand in line in the sun and all. When we were standing in line, I guess we were all lined up and an army guy, two army guys driving a jeep they saw us standing in line and they drove over, drove their jeep on the sidewalk where we were standing and actually ran a couple of us down, including myself. I still have a broken finger which I haven't bothered resetting from that day. My younger brother was studying to be a doctor and he had just finished first year and he said we wouldn't be able to get into Mulago hospital, you know there were too many things going on so I never bothered."

Yasmin: "It must have been painful."

Maurice: "It was. Exactly. Anyways those were incidents that happened... I've got my Ugandan I.D. at home and I have this thing."

Yasmin: "We'll take a scanned picture of it."

Maurice: "I have my international driver's permit which I had to leave when I was coming."

Yasmin: "So when did you leave?"

Maurice: "This happened and I decided to stay. I decided to stay and since I decided to stay, I liked my job and was making a little money and I had a car and I had a house. I was staying in my parents' house, my parents decided towards the end that they wanted to leave because it wasn't worth it. They didn't take any money out and they took my youngest brother who was five years old and they decided to go to India. And they left a few days before end of the exodus time limit. My other brother, my second brother, he came to Vancouver and he started studying at UBC [University of British Columbia] and there was no problems there.

My third brother - I told you my fourth brother went with my parents, he was five years old - my third brother went as a Ugandan refugee from England and finally landed... he was in one of those camps in England, no money and all that. He ended up going to Scotland to Edinburgh and studying medicine there. He put himself through, he used to come in the summer to Canada and work and all that, put himself through, and I helped all the brothers. That's what they did, I decided to stay and then about two or three days before the deadline I decided, I woke up one day and thought to myself, wait a minute, my friends are gone, my family is gone, why am I thinking of staying? What's money going to do? So I went to the Canadian embassy and they said, "Oh, we'll give you points because you're a professional etcetera, etcetera, and actually the guy who helped me... what's his name again?"

Yasmin: "Oh, Mike Molloy."

Maurice: "Mike Molloy. He was the guy who interviewed me and gave me the points."

Yasmin: "Did you meet him?"

Maurice: "No, I didn't. I saw him there, but there was such a crowd around him I couldn't get near him. Anyways, he's the one who helped me. So I left on the last plane out of Uganda. There were four of us Goans who left, another classmate who is in Toronto, another classmate who is in Ottawa, and one more. Anyways we left on the last plane out and I still remember as soon as we left the first thing we did... I think the stewardesses brought us something to drink, I forget if it was champagne or whatever, you know. I haven't seen them now until last July.

So we left. I went to... I landed as a refugee in Montreal to the army barracks and I've got the landed... I've got that at home, the landed immigrant stamp where I was staying. I believe it was a place called Longue-Pointe, and that's where I stayed for two weeks, and then because I had a brother studying at UBC, I decided I would come to Vancouver. So they allowed me after two weeks to move to Vancouver. I came to Vancouver and at that time I went to UBC to see if I could study, but then I figured I'd have to work not only to support myself, but to support my parents and my brother in India, my other brother in Scotland, and this brother in UBC also would need some money. So I said okay, doing a masters or PhD that's when I decided to do work. So my first job was working as a temporary worker at Canada Post."

Yasmin: "I think a lot of Ugandans did that."

Maurice: "Exactly. Then after I finished - I did that up until Christmas - and then after that even though I had a professional degree or technical degree, my next temporary job I was working as a bricklayer building the Pacific Centre, very hard job. Very hard."

Yasmin: "Very physical."

Maurice: "Very physical. No elevators so you had to walk up and down and carry bricks. So that was my next job, I did that until the middle of March. Then I used to go every couple of days to Immigration Canada to look at the jobs that are available, and they had a job available in a place called the Yukon in a mine up there... a lead zinc mine. They had a job available for what they called a [metallurgical], a mining technician. So I applied for that and I got it, so I started working on March 31, 1973 as a mining technician. So that's what I did. Other than that... I'll go through the jobs first and then I'll go through the family. Going through the jobs..."

Yasmin: "How long did you stay there? The Yukon?"

Maurice: "I left the Yukon on October the first, 1981. Yeah so, 1981 that's when I left the Yukon. Long time, eight and a half years. The temperatures were... my first winter I remember... my first summer I stayed in the Yukon was too cold for me. In the Yukon the summer it's like ten, fifteen degrees. So it was too cold for me after coming from Uganda. So, yeah... am I talking too fast? Yeah so anyway I stayed in the Yukon, 1973... moved up the ranks slowly. Temperatures in the winters were down to minus sixty. Very few Indians up there, probably three or four. The town I was living in had about seventeen hundred and fifty people total, maybe three Indians period. But you learned to mix with everyone and we were staying in bunk houses, dormitory bunk houses so we had our own room.

And 1974 September, I went with one of the guys... we went to Toronto, and while we were in Toronto I happened to come across this woman who had worked at the Voice of Kenya when I was climbing over the fence and I became... so I started dating her for the two weeks I was in Toronto. That was September '74, and I called her regularly after that from the Yukon. Then in December '74 I went to see her again. Then in April of '75 I proposed to her, brought her to Vancouver to meet my parents. So I think I jumped a little bit here... so I'll go back to my family after. Anyway she came over here to meet my parents April '75, September '75 we got married. Okay now my parents and my little brother went to India, and while they were in India I used to send them money to help them. Then one year later I sponsored them to come to Canada and they came to Vancouver and they started living in Richmond, they had an apartment or a house or something in Richmond and they were renting it and they were living there. My brother did his elementary school here, then he did his high school - that's the one who went with my parents - then he did his high school and he went to UBC and he studied to become a doctor. Then he went to Toronto and New Orleans and he became a specialist and he is now based in London, Ontario. So that was my youngest, the other brother and my parents came here.

The other brother who went to Scotland... and I helped him off and on, he used to come here. He put himself through university there in Scotland, in Edinburgh and he became a medical doctor, he is now in Edmonton. He had three clinics and he sold one recently, he sold two recently because he is now sixty-something and now he is working at the last clinic, one to keep busy. So anyway he is a doctor in Edmonton. The other brother who was at UBC, he became a pharmacist and he had two drugstores. He recently sold one in Alberta so he is now only keeping one and he's got one drugstore which is up in the northwest territories and he's got someone to run the drugstore there, he goes up every two or three months just to see how things are. And he's got some... I think a staff of eight or ten working for him there. That's where all the people... in a place called Nunavut. That's the family part."

Yasmin: "They all turned out to be very successful. With all your help, you must be very proud of yourself, putting them through school."

Maurice: "I know."

Yasmin: "I'm sure they appreciate it."

Maurice: "Well let me see, I'll check my pocketbook here, let me see... [Laughter] So having said all of that... that's what happened to the family."

Yasmin: "Your mom and dad..."

Maurice: "My mom and dad, they were living in Richmond and my father died in 1982, he had one of the original pacemakers and when it stopped I guess no one really knew, he died in '82. And my mom is still living, she is living in Edmonton with the other brother who is a doctor. And that was the one I have given you a contact. So that's how we all came to Canada. We've got a lot of relatives in Goa, in India, I've got relatives all over the world, including Toronto. So once and awhile I do go and meet them, and I've got half a dozen here."

Yasmin: "And these are relatives who migrated from Uganda? Or from Goa?"

Maurice: "Both. As you know Jinja was a small place - I'm just going back in time - Jinja was a small place, about fifty thousand people. I was actually looking at photographs a few days ago because I got a new... a friend of mine just went and so he sent back photographs. I'm slowly meeting friends of mine and classmates from Kampala and Nairobi. And that's about all I can think of until we left Uganda. Before I start talking about the Canadian life, is there any questions?"

Yasmin: "You said you met your wife and you got married?"

Maurice: "I met my wife in... I got married in September '75, and I'm going to be talking now about what happened in Canada. I'll talk about the family life for a minute. So I got married in September '75, we

lived and I worked up in the Yukon, she worked there also sometimes. As part of my time there I was working in mining but I also became the president for three and a half years of the union up there, six hundred and fifty people in the union. As you know we didn't have much experience to run unions back in Africa but we learned fast. In fact they had a couple of strikes there and this and that but leaving that aside... my two kids were both born in the Yukon, they both live in Vancouver now.

The Yukon was my first job, mining technician. When I moved from there in October '81 I moved to Edmonton and my job over there was working in petrochemicals. I was working in Edmonton for a company in petrochemicals. But one of the things I noticed whether it was the Yukon or whether it was in Edmonton, in those days working for... I used to have a hard time working for Caucasian bosses because they wanted you to do the work and when you write the reports they wanted to sign them. So that was my problem and that's why I quit the Yukon and that's why I after one year quit the petrochemical company and went to work for the WCB [Worker's Compensation Board] in Alberta, based in Edmonton. It was okay for two and a half years but eventually I got caught in the same thing, I got government bureaucracy, I got a boss who was determined that I would do the work and she would get the credit so I think probably after April, May of 1984 I quit that job and I went to work in a place called Kitimat in northern B.C. working for a company called Alcan.

I worked there from May 1984 until May 1990, but sometime in 1990 I got caught in the same thing where I got a boss who wanted me to do the work and him to sign the papers, my reports. And I couldn't take that so I quit. In the meantime - that was 1990 - but in the meantime in 1987 which was in the middle of my time there I studied and I took an extra certification which is recognized around the world in occupational health, so from then on I didn't have a problem, I could work anywhere in the world, I could get a job anywhere in the world. So... and I'm still certified in that. Then I took that certification and in May 1990 because I had the certification I decided to move to a company in Guelph. Kitimat had a problem as well, it had the second highest snowfall in Canada. I still have a photograph... I had a two story house and one winter I am shoveling snow and I am on the roof shoveling up. So you can imagine how much snow, and whenever it started snowing there every two hours I would go out and shovel snow so that the next day we would get my car out from the car port.

So anyways that was Kitimat and then I decided to move to a warmer area so all four of us moved and we moved to a place called Kamloops and I went to work for the forest industry but unfortunately it was very hot to the point where my wife and my younger daughter couldn't take the heat. It used to be July/August, still is, average is about forty degrees. It was too hot so we decided that... in the meantime the girls studied and my older one, she did really well in grade twelve and she got a really good at grade twelve and she got a really good scholarship and she wanted to go and study medicine so I said, "Well, in that case we better move." So we moved to... 1994 we moved to Vancouver, and that's how we finally landed in Vancouver. So..."

Yasmin: "You've been to quite a few places."

Maurice: "I have been to quite a few places right across the country, I've driven across. Anyways that's how I came here, and when I came here I... my first job I was looking after health and safety, and this is where everything goes around to when I first came to Canada. My first job in Canada was a temporary job with Canada Post, when I came back in 1994 I was looking after health and safety for Canada Post for B.C. and the Yukon. I did that but the only thing I couldn't stand was the bureaucracy of the government from Ottawa and doing this and doing that, ignored the workers sometimes. In health and safety there is no ignoring anyone, you just try to help everyone.

Anyway I looked after B.C. and Yukon from 1994 until October 2003, September, October. Then September, October 2003 Canada Post... well, two things happened there which are quite important because it affected me. Number one, Canada Post hired a manager for B.C. and the Yukon to look after health and safety who had never worked in that field. But I'm going to be kind and say she knew someone... she knew a man who was the head of the whole group for western Canada. Anyway, but in 2003 October, that was the first thing that affected me. The second thing that affected me was my wife was diagnosed with breast cancer so I decided to quit my job and stay home with her for a while, and that's what I did. I was working off and on as a consultant but I just stayed home for a couple of years until about 2005 when she died.

So anyways that's what happened, I was home until about - working off and on, I did private consulting off and on - until 2009, then in 2009 I went to work up in the Arctic, near Yellowknife for a big company called Rio Tinto who had bought Alcan. So as you can see some things go around. So I worked for Rio Tinto from 2009 until fairly recently when I decided that now was time to relax and not do anything, so just quit one day. And of course the Arctic as you may know is extremely cold, six months it is less than minus fifty. I think I only knew one or two people from India who were working up there in the mine of fifteen hundred people, and we used to get a lot of contractors. Rio Tinto wanted me to go work for them in Australia or Mongolia or England, Montreal which was the Canadian headquarters and I said, "No, I think it's time for me to quit." So that's what I did. You can ask any questions you want, if you want."

Yasmin: "You have a very interesting and diverse life, we have just been stuck in Vancouver all this time, just for a short period working in Kelowna. But you seem to be enjoying the cold, you have always been in the cold."

Maurice: "Well except now, relaxing in Vancouver and I live out in Ladner, probably one of these days I will wake up and decide to sell my house. It's a nice big four bedroom house. My older one became a doctor, she lives in Richmond and she's got two little ones, and I try to see them or babysit them once in awhile. My younger one is an occupational therapist and she lives in Burnaby. She has also done... she's got her own consulting firm. My older one, she works part time for Yaletown medical clinic downtown, and part time she works for women and children's hospital, and at least half a day a week, if not more she gives lectures to new medical residents. So I don't have to worry about anything or anyone for a while, all I have to do is look forward. So, any questions?"

Yasmin: "Do you look forward to more travel?"

Maurice: "More... I have one coming up in November and maybe one or two next year. I've got a lot of friends, whether it's Ismailis or Sikhs or Goans right across Canada. And one of the things when I travel, I try and meet them. When I was in Toronto for three weeks I met a lot of them, I was supposed to go to Quebec but I didn't have time, ran out of time and I came back to see my daughter. Other than that, what else have I... we've got a school reunion, we're trying to arrange a class reunion next July and so far we've got about twenty people going, we're trying to get a bunch of people."

Yasmin: "Reunion meaning from Uganda?"

Maurice: "From Uganda and Kenya. We've sent out about seventy email, we've got twenty that are definitely confirmed. We're going to get together in July, probably the first week of July in the Dominican Republic. You know all inclusive and basically just... some people we have lost touch with, but we found if I contact someone, he's got someone's email, so we are managing to get together a good string of emails. Yeah, so that's what we are going to do and try and have a big thing. As you know we are getting to our late sixties and seventies so it's time... and we've lost a few friends on the way, so we are trying to have something together."

Yasmin: "So I think one thing I wanted to ask you is when you were one of the last few who left, can you remember your journey from Jinja to Entebbe when you were going to fly out? Or did you move to Kampala the night before?"

Maurice: "No, I drove from Jinja to Entebbe. I had a suitcase with a hundred and one shillings, I remember because the hundred shillings were taken by the army at the airport, and I still have my one shilling somewhere. And I had one shirt and pants in my suitcase."

Yasmin: "Only one shirt and pants?"

Maurice: "Exactly. I drove from Jinja to Entebbe, locked my car in the parking lot and threw my keys as far as I could in the bushes and then flew out. So that's how I did that."

Yasmin: "You were angry when you threw your car keys."

Maurice: "No. I wasn't coming back. Any other questions? Feel free..."

Yasmin: "This is good, I want to know more about that Uganda piece. When the announcement was made and by the time your family was moved, tell me how did you transport your family, in the same way?"

Maurice: "In the same way. I used to take one at a time in the car. I used to drive them from Entebbe to put them on the plane, and off they went with their stuff. Sometimes... to be honest with you I didn't

know if they were all going, if one group was going to India, one was going to Scotland, another one came to Canada. I didn't know where I was going, I didn't... we never thought we would meet each other again, ever. Now at least we are all in Canada, which is fine. The ninety days were very..."

Yasmin: "Hard and tough."

Maurice: "Yeah. Whenever I get a chance, or if I am in Toronto, or if I drive across I have classmates and friends I try to meet up with. If I go to Kelowna I've got a classmate over there. My brother in law who went to Norway as a refugee - you may talk to him - but when he went as a refugee he was very lonely there and he, after a few months or years he met a Norwegian girl and married her. He was married to her for a few years but she didn't want to have kids I guess so he decided to divorce her and move to Canada where he had two brothers in Toronto and that's how he arrived in Toronto. Then he married my sister in law, so that's the one whose name I have given you. So that's how we... and he's probably one of my closest friends. He is the one coordinating this reunion trip next year."

Yasmin: "Oh, I see. Now for your parents, did you have to kind of... how did you convince your parents to leave? Because they were so much into the business..."

Maurice: "They were into the business, yes. But as they saw people leaving Uganda they also saw their business dropping off and they also saw there was a lot of violence. For example my uncle and aunt in Jinja, for example twice Africans came into their house, beat them up, robbed them. If I'm right I think one of them even died down there. So that's what happened, and of course their two kids, their daughter got married and went to England and the son went with his girlfriend to Goa. In the end both my nephew and niece both died. Well they're not nephew and niece, I guess they'd be my cousins. So they both died.

My parents saw that their business was... my mother was a schoolteacher - I never told you that - my mother was a schoolteacher, she was teaching in the school in Jinja the Muljibhai Madhvani Girls School, mostly African girls. I even taught there one summer, I was teaching the African girls in one summer. They're very poor and they used to come to school with torn clothes, barefoot, etcetera. So I used to teach for one summer, that's what I was doing. So my mother was the schoolteacher there, she was the strict parent of the family. Anyways I convinced them, I said, "Look..." I didn't convince them, they could see that we were going nowhere, business was dropping off. So I said, "You might have to go to India." So they left everything and went to India."

Yasmin: "And they are the ones who selected India?"

Maurice: "They are the ones who selected India."

Yasmin: "Out of Canada, London, or whatever."

Maurice: "Yeah, and even if they had come to Canada or London or whatever, it was easier for me to go ahead and try and get a job and then sponsor them and that's what I said I'd do and that's what I did."

Yasmin: "But they had family in India to help? Did the Indian government help them out?"

Maurice: "No. They had family but they went and did their own thing and looked after themselves, that sort of thing. No one helped them out there, then one year later I sponsored them and brought them out here. So, yeah... the first few years were pretty tough. I must say the first five years, I know when my older one was born I went to see how much money I had in the bank account and I was on negative. Still today I remember that."

Yasmin: "But you did something good for your family."

Maurice: "I don't worry about that anymore. As I explained to my girls, I said what counts is the fact that they are successful. As far as I'm concerned, we're moving ahead."

Yasmin: "A lot of people that I have interviewed say that when they look back, they feel that what happened in Uganda is a blessing in a sense because they have come to a better country, better education, better medical. Do you agree to that?"

Maurice: "Of course. When I went back in 2013 to Kenya and Tanzania I saw the way of life there. I mean, after we finished the two week safari we had thirty six hours to sit in the hotel in Nairobi before we came home, before we went back to Toronto and then come to Vancouver. While I was sitting there I was talking to people who are still there - very few Asians - and in fact the morning we were leaving, we were flying out at about eight or nine at night, so that morning I talked to one of the guys who was with me on my trip. There were thirty-one of us and he was about twenty-three, twenty-four and I said, "Would you like to come? I'm going to see my university, University of Nairobi. It's about four or five blocks walking." He said, "Sure."

So we went out seven o'clock in the morning and we walked down to the university, four or five blocks and I would say I saw maybe three non-black faces. I remember my brother and his wife were on the trip as well and they were having breakfast as I was about to leave and my brother said, "Maurice, I don't think you should go." I said, "Look, I want to see my university." He said, "Don't worry about it, it might cost you your life," he says, "I don't think you should go." I remember very clearly, I turned around and I said, "Okay, it's nice knowing you." And I went walking. I walked down with this other guy and we went down to the university, walked around and we went to see the dormitories. The university and the dormitories were separated by a tunnel which we went under, we went there."

Yasmin: "You went through the tunnel?"

Maurice: "Yes, and we walked around everything and then we came back, no problem. Then later that day... oh! That was also the time they had the shooting of the Westgate mall. The hotel was one and a

half blocks from Westgate mall, so we were... the Sikh who was the CEO of the Aga Khan hospital, I had phoned him before I left here and I sent, "Could you spend a few hours taking us around Nairobi?" And he said, "Sure." So he came and he picked us up, he picked up me and my Sikh friend from Richmond, he came to pick us up and take us around. He took us to the Muthaiga golf course and he took us to some other places, and my older one had said... I said, "Do you want anything from Kenya?" She said, "Dad can you get me for the two little ones, the girls, can you get me a couple of kitenges?" I said, "Okay."

We went to a few stores and we couldn't find any kitenges because the tourist season was just ended and a lot of the tourists had been buying the kitenges. Then the guy who was looking after the hotel, African guy, he said, "The only place they might have is in the basement of the Hilton." He said, "You go to the Hilton and in the basement is a little small duka you go there and there's an African store. You might be able to get it." So I asked the Sikh guy if he would take us and he took us there. We went into the store, we walked in and the African guy said, "Oh, if you want this it's sixty dollars." I said, "Sixty dollars for one kitenge?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "Okay, thanks that's fine. I don't need it that badly." So I'm walking out and he says, "Okay, how much are you offering?" I said, "I'll give you ten dollars." He said, "No, ten is too little." I said, "Okay, fine." I started walking out and he said, "Okay I'll take it." So that's how I got two kitenges for my daughter.

We came out and then I went to the Sikh guy and we toured Nairobi and then we have lunch at the Muthaiga golf course. Then from there when we were going back to the hotel because I had to catch the bus to the airport, I said to him, "Can you pass by the Westgate mall? I want to see some of the shooting." So we passed maybe not too far away from the main road and we could see the flashes of the fighting and the gunfire and all that. So yeah, I remember that quite clearly. That was the time it took place."

Yasmin: "That is when some of our relatives died."

Maurice: "Yeah. Other than that I also went to... I decided another guy who was with me on the Nairobi trip and wanted to go and buy some leather shoes. We went to look at leather shoes and it was quite interesting, we walked into the store and they were all Africans. Shoes, I think we wanted to buy size nine and size ten. We bought the two that were size nine, the two shoes were not the same size. The two shoes that were size ten were not the same size in the style that my friend wanted. So they were not even the same size. So in the end we came back with no shoes but... other than that, we didn't buy any shoes there. That was my trip to Africa. No, I didn't go back to Uganda, but a friend of mine went back last week and just sent me a small video of Kampala, so I've seen that video as well."

Yasmin: "Doesn't that make you want to go back? Does your heart not go back, that you want to see Jinja and your house and all that?"

Maurice: "No, not really. I am quite satisfied with my life and the way I look at it now... I mean, if I had the chance would I go to see Kampala and Jinja and Mbale? No. The way I look at it now, I've reached the age where I want to look forward, not backward. So I don't look backward. That's my attitude."

Yasmin: "That's positive."

Maurice: "I have no good memories from there, so... questions?"

Yasmin: "No, I don't think so."

[End of transcript].