

The Ugandan Asian Archive Oral History Project

An Oral History with Munira Dhanani

Archives and Research Collections

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Narrator: Munira Dhanani
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Abstract:

Munira and her two younger sisters were all born in Uganda. Her parents were second generation Ugandans who ran several local businesses. Her father was even the team leader for Uganda's national table tennis team. Munira recalled the difficulties her family faced when fleeing Uganda after the expulsion decree.

Since her father was well known within Uganda as well as within the Ismaili Muslim community he was a potential target for Amin's military regime. Initially they were able to seek asylum in the UK since her mother had retained a British passport. After a few months in the UK her family decided to move to Canada in February of 1973.

Munira moved into the life insurance business following her father's footsteps. She remembered the turbulence and excitement of adapting to Canadian society. She also provided a detailed account of her father's transition to life in Canada and the major role he played in the family's resettlement.

The interview was conducted at a local Tim Horton's in Toronto, Ontario.

Shezan: “Perfect, so today is... what’s the date? February 15th?”

Munira: “We’re February 15th today.”

Shezan: “Awesome so this is Shezan Muhammedi doing an oral history for February 15th. And, do you want to start?”

Munira: “Wow, this is lovely. I’m going to start with a little bit of where we were in Uganda before all of this happened in 1971, ’72 with Idi Amin taking over. My grandfather on my mom’s side was approximately second generation Ugandan, having come from the Indian background. My grandfather on my father’s side was approximately second or third generation Ugandan as well, I’m not quite sure where our family tree began on the Dhanani side, but my grandfather on my father’s side passed away when my father was only thirteen years old so I never got a chance to get to know him. But my bapaji which is my grandpa on my mother’s side which is Count Salim Jaffer, a fabulous individual, very soft at heart. My mom along with her eleven siblings, he knew each one of his children by name, he knew each one of his grandchildren by name, and he also knew each one of his great grandchildren by name. He passed away at approximately the age of 88 or so back in the year of 1988, and that was in Vancouver, B.C. [British Columbia]. But having gone through the hurdles of being expelled from Uganda back in 1972, everybody had to leave everything behind.

Very few established families might have had some footing in some countries abroad, namely the U.K. or perhaps the U.S. But Canada was not a very common country that our elders spoke about back in those years, it was usually yeah, alright we’ll do this in England, things like that. Or at the most we’ll do something in Paris. And then a handful of, “Oh yeah, well we’ve got hotels and stuff in the U.S.” and so on and so forth and things of that nature. With my father being a self-made individual, since he lost his father at the age of thirteen, he didn’t have anything abroad, it was all within the local area. Because he had my grandmother, he had three older sisters and he had a younger brother. So being the first of the sons, traditionally that’s what one would do is the eldest of the sons would take over supporting the family.

So dad was out there doing part time jobs, very business minded. Always very successful in his business ventures that he has established and moved on with, always had everything in the local area. So then we come into Idi Amin’s time where we’ve got an established family, everything is going good. Here comes this one fine day where Idi Amin says, “I don’t want anybody here except for my black Africans, even if you are Ugandan citizens, and Ugandan born – out. Just get out.” And that’s what it was. Along the way as my father was established in the business areas he was also very active in terms of volunteering both in the local Ismaili community as well as in different cultures through Kampala. In the early 1972 time frame, I can’t remember whether it was the end of January or into February my dad was a team leader for the ping pong team to China.”

Shezan: “Wow.”

Munira: “Yes! And it was fabulous because ping pong is a small sport in the Canadian culture, but back in Africa it was a big thing. And for him to be the team leader and for him to bring the Ugandan team to travel to China. He had approximately, I’d say ten to twelve players with him, but through the prep of it

all and through the travels of it all, returning from all of that, he was very involved with the Ugandan government. So of course, he had been to the Idi Amin state back in Entebbe, as well as getting to introduce the team members to meet the various members of the parliament and so on. So there was a lot of interaction going on. So my dad was pretty well known first hand. Then he was also known Aga Khan Club because of the sports passion that he had. So there was snooker which was a very popular pastime for our lifestyle there. Dad was also a fabulous cricketer, cricket was his passion.

We also played a lot of tennis, we had badminton tournaments locally, almost every weeknight. So with all those involvements and with Idi Amin knowing him firsthand because of him leading the team to China. When the expulsion was announced gradually Idi Amin was starting pointing fingers at people that he knew that were leaders or heads of different levels in different communities, it wasn't just the Ismaili community that was being tackled, it was also the other communities that were being tackled. But in the Ismailis because we're so tight knit, when somebody is being kidnapped or someone is being tortured, you hear of it first-hand. Because news travels like dominoes, right?

So when the headquarters to Jamat Khana in Kampala was broken into, that's when my dad's name came out the second time around. It wasn't just as a team leader to China earlier in the year of '72. But when as when Jamatkhana was broken into my dad was a big member of the council there, so his name was exposed a second time around. Having said that, that was the weekend prior. So the weekend after is when our neighbour below us came home that afternoon and he said to my dad, he said, "You know what? You need to leave. You need to get out because your name is on the hit list, they're looking for you." In the meantime there had been so many Ismailis that had already been tortured or murdered, there was a lot of slaughter going on. Because that's what Idi Amin did. He had no value for humanity, my god. For the man who would chew the skin off his own children, what's he going to care, right?

So here's my neighbour and my dad sitting in my living room talking about this and my dad was adamant that he says, "You know what? If I do leave, we all go together." He says, "I'm not leaving my mother, my wife, or my three children." At this point the youngest of us three daughters was only four months old. So my neighbour luckily also is a travel agent and I think that's how he found out that my father was on the hit list and he wanted my father to flee. And he assured my dad, he said, "You know what? Regardless of what you want to do, if you want to all leave together." He says, "First of all your baby daughter is not on any documents, how are you going to get her out of the country? Let alone that, how are you going to even get a ticket for her when she's not documented anywhere?"

So come Monday morning, first things first, here dad was downtown on Kampala road trying to get into the immigration office to get my sister's name on some form of document so we could all travel. And over there with local contacts and a little bit of bribery – and I'm going to use that term very loosely, because that's how we did things back there, not so much here – but relationships and knowing people in different avenues certainly helps. Things like that helped by the afternoon my sister's name was on some form of travel document, my grandmother's documents came into fruition as well because with her being in Uganda for almost three to four generations, travel was not something that really appealed to her, but we were able to get some sort of confirmation that she was in Uganda and we got travel documents. But that evening we were already at the Lake Victoria Hotel, close to Entebbe airport. The

bus ride is beyond description. Oh Shez, you have no idea. The kind of palpitations we went through, I don't know how many unknown heart attacks my father may have faced through that evening.

But we... when dad got the documents ready by that afternoon, one of our drivers came home and spoke in Swahili and he said to my grandmother and to my mother, "Let's just go. Bwana is waiting for us." Bwana means master, or mister, my dad being his boss, "Bwana is waiting for you." So he drove us to the downtown core and my mother's brother, my uncle, lived in the downtown area so we went straight to his home, dad met us there. So Shez here... there was no time to pack. The biggest concern was do we have enough baby formula? Diapers were not a concern because everything was cloth, right? And not knowing what we were approaching, the only concern that my mother had was, "Alright, I know there's been tension between yesterday and today... we're just going. As long as I've got baby formula, whatever I can put in my handbag is all we can leave with." My grandmother had no idea what was going on, she just followed what instructions would come through us through the driver.

So here we were in our regular clothing, right? Heading out to my uncle's home downtown in Kampala. Dad followed in they used code words because you can't use proper language. My uncle was as nervous as anything because now here's his baby sister – my mother, coming from a family of eleven members was the second last, she was the tenth of the eleven siblings – and my uncle is the second of the eleven. Well... the six sisters and the five brothers, my uncle was the second in line of the brothers and here's his baby sister and her family trying to flee alive, without being tortured. And he was just shaking like a leaf thinking, what is going on here? Not knowing whether we were going to see anybody again, or what's going to happen as we try and drive out to the Entebbe airport, because you couldn't drive there in your private car. Checkpoints were just everywhere so we had to go down to the Grand Hotel where all the busses were departing to take all of us into Entebbe. Because our flight was not scheduled to leave until the following morning. It was Tuesday morning at approximately 7 a.m. or something along that line, we couldn't stay in Kampala. We definitely couldn't stay in Kampala and stay with my uncle because by now people are following you. But having said that, I'm going to back track... on that Sunday evening after that Sunday morning conversation with my neighbour below, the travel agent and my dad, there was a little check mark on our door."

Shezan: "Really?"

Munira: "Yes. We didn't know about this. So when dad left town Monday morning, he saw something unusual on the door, but because he wanted to keep his calm and keep all of us calm at home, meaning my mom and grandma, didn't say a word. But between our neighbour and him, it was confirmed that my dad is officially a target."

Shezan: "A marked man."

Munira: "Yeah. So of course when the driver came home and so on and so forth, yeah. My mom wasn't going to argue, my grandma wasn't going to sit there and argue. But the drive out from the bus to the airport well... where are we going to stay overnight? Right? You can't stay with your uncle because then you're jeopardizing his life and his family. You're going to get my mother's family all involved because if

they can't find the target they're looking for, then they're going to go through almost every individual that we have connections with, and their lives are in jeopardy.

So we got out to the Grand Hotel by around 7 p.m. on the Monday evening, got on the bus. Now with our luck this wasn't even a full bus so it was just us and two other families. When I say other families... when I talk about us, Shez, it was my father, my mother, my grandmother, and the three of us, six of us. The second family was a mother and daughter and the third family was just a single individual who was one of our Ismaili friends. So here you have approximately, what is it? Nine people on the bus, and it's a full bus. It's the size of a normal local school bus that we have here. But when you only have ten people there, you stand out, right? Because it's not a packed bus. So here we are driving out of the driveway from the bus terminal by the Grand Hotel, heading towards the city core to the actual ramp that takes you into Entebbe airport and there was this huge roundabout. There was some geographical regions I still remember because I was... I was almost twelve by then.

But having been with my dad, I guess from the three of us daughters, my sisters will argue that. Fifi not so much, I know my second sister will argue that I was always closest to my dad. To a large extent, yes. I'm proud to say I was, but not that my dad thought any lesser of my younger sisters, right? He had equal love for all three of us in his own way but I've been doing a lot of local things with my dad as I was growing up, I was always doing activities at the club, with his doing mini rallies and the car racing and so on and sometimes a lot of the cricket tournaments used to be in Entebbe so I would hop in the car and drive out with him and spend the whole day out there so on and so forth. So there are some geographical areas where I remember quite well. So anyways this roundabout as it led us into the highway that takes us into Entebbe... just as you cross the roundabout, there is this wall there that was our first checkpoint stop. Now, the military, the army, they're well dressed in their uniforms. They're not exactly alert because the local culture there, all they did was drink and eat, and torture and slaughter.

So this first checkpoint the bus door opens, this one army person walks up a couple of steps getting into the bus and his gun is just dangling all over the place, you know he had one of those long rifles. And do you know what? By then it's like eight o'clock in the evening and they've had a few to drink, they have no control over what they're doing, blood shot red eyes. And he's talking in Luganda which is another dialect in Kampala for the locals that they use, Swahili was the primary, Luganda was one of the secondary's and he's talking to the bus driver about something, I don't know what they're saying, I can't clearly remember, but it was obviously to do with, "All right, you know what? So how many are these?" And, "Where are they going? What time are their flights?" and things of that nature.

Not even maybe five minutes' drive onto the highway, here is another checkpoint and by this time I could see the look on my dad's face change very quickly. On the first one it wasn't so bad, you could feel the tension, but it wasn't so bad. I think he had the comfort of my grandmother sitting there praying her brains off, do you know she was just constantly praying. And they say the power of prayer is just something that keeps you going so he could feel that power through my grandmother, constant prayer through the first checkpoint, didn't bother him that much. But the second one? For some reason that whole excitement of yes, okay we're driving out, we're getting out, we're going to be safe, my family is going to be safe. That was sort of fading off of his face, I couldn't see as much of that.

So the door opened, and here is this other person in a uniform walking up two or three steps into the bus, this time he's not even talking to the bus driver and he was looking at all the passengers, and having said that, the passengers... there was only ten of us, right? Primarily our family was the largest, we were six, the other one two and the third one was just himself. And my dad... leadership that he always had, he sat right at the seat there closest to the staircase and the door of the bus. So sure enough this guy marches in two or three steps, again his gun is just dangling because not only was he drunk as well with these red bloodshot eyes and so on, but he could barely stand. And... we got through, I don't know what happened, I'm not sure if there was any communication exchanged, but we got through.

Now you're feeling all this tension, you know your dad is losing his confidence, right? Your grandmother is praying even harder within her heart than she was for the first few minutes, but more so now going forward, and you don't even know if you should communicate with the bus driver anymore or not, because you don't know whether or not you're actually going to make it to the hotel so you just quietly sit there. The drive normally in our good years from Kampala into Entebbe with our private cars would be maybe twenty minutes, half hour tops, right? Took us almost forty five minutes Shez, forty five minutes. And the silence, and we know, the silence is the biggest killer because time doesn't fly when you're sitting there quietly, it just feels like it's the longest... forty five minutes later we made it right to the airport.

Now here, you couldn't afford to sit at the airport or even to stay there overnight because you know your father is a target, right? You needed to get to the hotel. How do you do this? So the second family, the lady with her daughter, she was flying out that night, so that wasn't so much of a concern. But the third family, the single individual that was with us, his flight wasn't until the next morning either and luckily his flight was with ours so we were all heading out together. Now, knowing each other because dad and him knew each other, they decided that alright we've got to find a way to get to the hotel. Because there is no way you can be here, the two men with a female family, being my mother, my grandmother and the three of us. We couldn't stay overnight at the exposed airport.

Tried to find a local taxi to drive you there and to also make arrangements for the same taxi and the same driver to be there at the hotel by five a.m. to bring you back to the airport because your flight is taking off at seven or eight or something like that, but you had all these little immigration matters to check in and get yourself clear so that you can actually walk out onto the tarmac and get yourself on a plane. We didn't have terminals, we just walked out of the actual building at the airport across the tarmac and climbed up the stairs into the plane. So between my dad and the other gentlemen we spoke to this local driver there, it wasn't even a proper taxi service, which didn't exist to a large scale. We got to the hotel, got into a room and here we are all huddled in together but you had to be as quiet as possible. Being as young as I was I didn't really fully understand what was happening. And the impact of not wanting to stay quiet, but here my dad had to remain low key, couldn't give out any clues as to where he was or what was happening and of course none of the adults left that night, it was just the three of us kids, right? But through the night as days went on and we started to hear a lot of stories, dad started to speak, mum started to speak. There were military people around the hotel that because

things were so quiet in the room everybody remained safe and come five a clock when we all had to be ready to go back into the taxi to be driven to the airport, we had to be very discreet.

So as we checked in the night before to be able to not make it very obvious that we were checking out so early the same morning, dad had already cleared our tab and everything at the hotel so it was very quick. We were picked up right across the hotel room when the taxi arrived at five a.m., driven through the airport and here's another soldier that's come along. Tension like you won't believe. Now here that early in the morning there's not so many people, except for the locals, right? You have all these people at the airport and you don't know how many of them are official staff, and how many of them are just locals lingering around. Not having any luggage was not the issue, but along the way... somewhere along the way the process of how we left yesterday afternoon which was Monday afternoon from home with our driver heading downtown to my uncle's place. Between my mum and my grandmother they had packed up some of the valuables from maybe a few weeks prior but I don't think it happened between Sunday and into Monday, but it may have been from the time that the expulsion was announced and to protect your valuables they must have done some prepacking."

Shezan: "Something they could just grab at the last minute."

Munira: "That's it. So as much as we didn't have suitcases we had luggage. So this was where my grandmother's hand luggage was being thoroughly checked, my mother's hand luggage was being thoroughly checked. And they couldn't understand why baby formula, well my mother was not nursing so my baby sister was on formula, but anyhow. So then we had to go and individually be hand searched, right? So here my grandmother went in first, got searched, they came out with her hand luggage on the side and gave it to one of the officers and my grandmother... you know, again didn't say much but she had tears that were just dribbling down her face and my dad knew that whatever valuables she had in there were being possessed.

Now it's our turn, mum and the three of us. So mum gets frisked, the baby gets frisked, even through her crotch, right? Because locals would do anything to try and smuggle things out, but we weren't smuggling. We weren't exactly going to lie about what we had, which wasn't much except for the clothing that we had on us and whatever hand luggage had the formula, and that is the baby formula that we had. My turn, my sister's turn, and here goes the hand luggage, my mother was just shaking like a leaf, she could barely hold my baby sister but we managed to get out of that little inspection room. Again, it was like bloody from her the tears were just non-stop, she could barely say anything to my dad.

So here was my dad, you know back in the little officer's room he's saying to them, he says, "Look, my wife is of British descent, I'm a Ugandan. I'm just going to drop them off and I'm coming right back. So why do you want our possessions? It's going to come back. We're only travelling so I can drop my family off." So mum having a British passport was major help. Somewhere along the way through the early hours of that very, very quiet morning at the airport, the officer was fine. He says, "Okay, go on, take it." So here we are wrapped, made sure that it was sealed, zippered or whatever the case may be, if we lost items along the way as we were running out of the building into the tarmac to get on the plane, god only knows but it didn't matter. You had to run for your life.

Got on the plane. For me, it was my first time ever on an airplane, right? Because we did a lot of local travelling, we had vacations and we used to go to Nairobi, we used to do all kinds of fun things. We never had a vacation where we had to get on the plane. So that was my very first experience and I'm thinking wow, you know? So I fasten the seatbelt and the seat is taller than I am because you're all so tiny and stuff like that. It didn't matter to me at that point what pressures my father was still feeling because of the excitement of getting on a plane. So here I am, and I didn't even know what was happening at that time with my grandmother, or my mother and baby, or my sister, and my dad, yeah... he just wanted to make sure that that plane door closed and we took off. Once you take off you know you're safe. But while you're still there on the ground and your plane is not moving, they could still come out there and get you out.

Shez, that twenty-four to forty-eight hour time frame was the worst we've, at least myself, was put through. I can't even begin to describe what may have gone through my dad, how many internal heart attacks he may have suffered through that forty-eight hour time frame. What must have gone through my grandmother with all of that full heart of prayer that was within her heart and she was just going on and on and on, not out loud in voices, but just internally in her silence, she was just praying all the way through. My mother was trying to keep balance with her strength of prayers with her wanting to be in control for all three of us. The moment the plane started to move and we could feel the take off and just the rising into the air, that's when I saw colour come back into my dad's face. Because now we were actually taking off, right? So here is the first hurdle that you have overcome. Shez, we only flew out to Nairobi. [Laughter]

After all that. I can laugh about it now, but I had no idea what was going on then, right? So here we are on flight... before you could even settle down and enjoy the comforts of what it is to be on a plane and flying, you were getting ready to land. And I'm thinking, what happened here? I thought we were flying away somewhere far. Well, no because the extent of all the tickets and all the travel arrangements was just to get us out of the Ugandan border. Granted, it was still within East Africa, but we were now in Kenya... big difference because they can't come and get you there. They can't come and kidnap you and take you back and slaughter you or whatever, right? So here we are now in Nairobi airport, what do you do? Obviously you get off the plane, you sit there at the airport building and you let the adults do what they have to do.

So here's my dad on the phone now because of his involvement with all these various sporting activities with his business ventures because he was an entrepreneur, he had all of these relationships in Nairobi which were a major help. So first things first, having said that my mum comes with a family of eleven siblings, the oldest of the eleven lives in Nairobi. So here's my dad on the phone with them and her family to get her adult sons to try and make arrangements now for us to fly forward, meaning we can't live in Nairobi, we're on travel mode so you know what, let's arrange for tickets now from Nairobi to London.

At the same time, because we didn't have prearranged travel plans to stay in Nairobi, it was important for us to get out of the airport and to even attempt going into the city. So here we from I think about 9 a.m. or somewhere along there until about late afternoon, early evening at Nairobi airport. So we're watching all this traffic go out and all of that, so it was kind of exciting. At least for me it was, what was

going on through my dad and the adults in their minds, I have no idea. In the meantime my cousin comes along, which is my mum's nephew, so the adults are talking and you're sitting there and you're looking and thinking yeah, yeah. Because you don't know what's going on, you didn't feel the impact that they were feeling... all you knew is you were travelling, that's all. So here's my cousin with my mom and dad talking about whatever they were talking about, he left and then he came back again. In the meantime a couple of other friends stopped by the airport to meet with my dad, so through that process while all of these little meetings were going on, these are the people who helped us financially as well as making travel arrangements to get us tickets to then fly out to London, because that's your primary destination, to then be able to decide where you're going to go.

Because my father was targeted in Uganda in being so well known through Kampala with all the various locals and all the sporting communities and all that, our Canadian immigration interview day was not until a lot later from the day that we had to flee. So we had no place to go. By this time we were classified as being stateless, right? With the exception of my mum having a British status, my father is now officially stateless. So that evening, which is Monday evening – pardon me, Tuesday evening. We got on a British Airways airplane, much bigger than the one we had flown that morning from Entebbe airport and I'm thinking, wow this is getting even better! Now here's a bigger airplane, right? Little did I know what was happening. So we flew out of Nairobi... it wasn't a direct flight we had to stop over in Addis Ababa.

Now, Addis Ababa again was going through its own political ruffraff right? My dad is still in a panic, as much as yes, there's relief that we're not going to be on the continent of Africa for too long, the political issues in Addis Ababa being what they were, were not in any comfort to my dad. Passengers were not allowed to get off the plane, it was just a short stop, but a stop nonetheless because we were picking up passengers from there. But anything is possible, you know Africa is Africa. Took off from there, from Addis Ababa we were then on our way to Paris. Stopped there, we had to change flights, luggage was not an issue, all we had was hand luggage. And through those hours between being in Nairobi for that Tuesday morning from about 9 a.m. til about early or late afternoon, evening kind of thing. I don't think between my mom and my grandmother it occurred to them to see what kind of possessions that were still in the bag or what was missing or whatever, it wasn't a concern. The fact is, we were still alive, we were still in one piece, we're travelling. That's what we're doing, we're travelling, that's what we're doing. Got to Paris, luggage was not an issue waiting to get on board, got on a plane there again to now fly to Heathrow airport, that was our last little travel arrangement. Freezing cold by then, right? Because now you're looking at somewhere around mid-October or something like that. Having lived in Kampala all my life, you don't know what winters are like..."

Shezan: "By the equator..."

Munira: "Yeah, the worst you may have experienced is heavy rainfall and that, too was not a regular event. Freezing. And what do you have? Just your regular clothing. You may have been able to... I don't know, if your mother thought about it have a cardigan or something like that but no, we just had our regular clothes on. So nothing like that. So with a little bit of shivering and all the excitement of hey, I'm not in Africa anymore, right? I came on the plane across the way, and I'm in Paris! My god, you know. We'd never seen an escalator before. [Laughter] So as you were in arrivals and you're heading up the

escalator to find your departure gate, didn't know how to step on the escalator, right? So here's your dad guiding you, you're holding your grandma's hand because your mom is holding the baby and your dad is also trying to watch your sister, because it was three adults, three kids, right? So each one of us was assigned to each other. Trying to learn how to get on the escalator, that was a little bit of a task. But you know it was exciting at the same, you had to wait for these lines between the stairs to come through so that you made the right step. Took a little while. Took the... stood on the escalator while you had the little one going up the stairs. Got off and then you're looking and you're thinking, wow, this is a humongous airport. Kampala airport is not that big, Entebbe my god it had two buildings, one terminal in which you have arrival and departure and the other one's your guest terminal where you did your receiving, you're entertaining and there's a restaurant and so on and you wave goodbye to people who were leaving.

Nairobi airport, known as a really nice airport, well our few hours there were not very active because we just stayed in that one area because parents were making arrangements so that you could move on. So here you are on the upper level now of the Paris airport and you're looking around and you're thinking this is humongous, you know its glass covered and you're looking at all these different areas and you're saying to yourself, there's so many planes around here and then it's all open and all these cars are going by and they're driving on the wrong side of the road and I'm thinking okay, what is it I missed over here? But anyway the excitement of it all was what was keeping me going, not paying attention to a lot of what was happening. Again, being at the age that I was it was all the adults who were doing the planning and the worrying and so on, and you were just in transit, right?

So we get on this plane – again, it wasn't a very small one, but this was KLM flight – just a short flight because from Paris to Heathrow it's not that far, its maybe forty minutes or something along the way. So again, by the time you get seated, you're getting comfortable and you're getting ready to land. Got to Heathrow airport and now you're sitting there and the officials are arguing with your father, because of course you're coming in without any documentation, right? You had no time in Uganda to prep for anything, you're on the run, so to speak, for the sake and safety of your life and your family's lives. So now my father is officially stateless, but my mother had a British passport. Not good enough for these Brits as we're trying to get in. Constant arguing and I don't know what was going on but it took forever and ever. And then finally we were put on this mini bus, and we didn't know where – at least us kids – didn't know where we were going.

My dad of course by then had an idea, that you know what, we were going to end up in a camp. And sure enough, it wasn't just a regular camp where most Ugandan refugees were being taken to. We were in what was known as a detention camp. Just a small building, just the size of maybe a kindergarten school in the local areas here that we see. So you've got this building that's... its either L-shaped, or at least a three-tier building. This one here was just one level, didn't even have a second floor. Had a small little gated compound, and it was a detention camp. And at the most it maybe had thirty rooms, and you put two people in a room. So it's maybe a fancier version of a jail cell, right? But they gave you a kitchenette, they gave you a common area for showers and toiletry, so you didn't have these in your little rooms, so to speak. Now I can say jail cells, right?

So we get in there and even at the entrance there your father's being harassed, in terms of accommodation. They wanted to put all six of us in one room and my dad was like no way. He says, "I've got my mother, I've got a wife and a baby and two children, you can't just put us in a small room like this with two beds. My mother," which is my dad's mother, he was telling the officer there at the door, "She's in her fifty-plus age group, she has been on the road for the last two and a half days, she needs a proper bed. My wife and my children, same thing. We need proper beds including myself. And as a couple, we need privacy. My dad had to do anything and everything he could so that we could get proper beds. It didn't matter if we were all going to be in one room, but he tried to get privacy as well. Because you know what, my grandmother being an elderly figure, she needs her own space. We weren't asking for a fabulous accommodation because obviously that building didn't offer anything fabulous anyhow – it was a detention camp! But we needed to have at least something that was at least half decent and gave you privacy. So sure enough, they said, alright we'll give you two rooms.

So here's one room for mom and dad and the baby, and here's the other room for grandma and the two of us, my sister and myself. Got in there and then you want to know where the toilet is because we didn't say washrooms, we said toilet, right? And then you wanted to know where you could go to have a bath because you hadn't had a bath in a couple of days, god. Now you could feel the body odour and the filth, you're so sticky you want to get washed. Well they lead you into the common area where the men had their own shower stalls and toilet, and the women had their own shower stalls and toilet because none of the rooms had any individual accommodation. Well you've never done anything like this before, right? Common facilities, except for yeah, when you go to hotels, but then those are luxury hotels, you don't see shower stalls over there, but the toilets there were quite fancy when you went to those luxury hotels. But this here the detention camp, it was far from luxury.

So now you had to make this adjustment. Okay well we're in London and you hear all these good things about how, you know what everything is nice and so on, but we're in a detention camp. My god, horrifying, right? So you get in there, you get washed and so on and so forth, then they come out to you and they have these T.V. dinners that they call... your meals, so that's your first dinner, or first meal so to speak in London, right? Out of this foil tray the size of a T.V. dinner, well they didn't have microwaves in those days so you had to wait for these ovens to heat up your so-called T.V. dinner, right? So you're sitting there again in a common kitchen and canteen area waiting for your dinner to warm up, and you're looking and you're saying, "Oh my god this is how they serve you in London?"

Anyhow, so we moved on, had a good night sleep, next morning dad had to do what he had to do so he was on the phone with all these people, how do we get out of here? You don't want to be living here... that was the whole idea of trying to get you out of there safe, alive, and then into another country, right? Now this task starts, how do I get out of here? Because of the snootiness of the Brits, I don't want to live here. The plan was not to live here, anyway. The plan was to go through Canadian immigration interviews and to get into Canada because the Aga Khan and Pierre Trudeau, a lot of the Ismailis would be looked after, but we were not able to stay in Uganda to go through the process of having the interview and being selected and so on and so forth and come through those channels that the Aga Khan had arranged for us to come out with. So here's dad on the phone with all of these people and at

that time we had Sir Eboo from Nairobi, remember? But, no you weren't even around, so I can't say remember to you, but..."

Shezan: "But I've heard about him..."

Munira: "You've heard about him over the years. And so a couple of days later Sir Eboo with a handful of his friends and whoever committee members were in the London area came to visit us at the detention camp, now here you're thinking you know what? Here's this community leader that's coming to meet with you, and you're in a detention camp, how do you show your hospitality? You can't offer them tea or coffee or a snack, which is generally what we did back home."

Shezan: "Yeah, exactly. Absolutely."

Munira: "Right? Someone came into your home, the first thing you did, depending on what time of day it was, your lunch was on the go, or your dinner is being prepped, you know it's all laid out, and you could see that in my dad, in my mom, and my grandmother. Here is Sir Eboo, he's one of our head leaders in the community, he's the right hand man to the Aga Khan, right? He's coming to see you at the detention centre and you've got nothing to offer him, but yet you're seeking his help to get you out of here so you can have some normalcy and make some plans to move forward. So anyways here's Sir Eboo with my dad who's sitting there, talking about all of these things. As kids, you don't know what they're talking about, but along with community events, they were also chit-chatting about political issues, and how do we get out of here so that we can get Canadian immigration going so we can move on to Canada.

Having said that Shez, with all the help from Sir Eboo and other community members, we were detained for at least six weeks in that little camp. So of course the first few days, it didn't matter to myself or my sister, but it was really bothering my parents and my grandmother, where have we come? Right? We wanted to save our lives, we wanted to get out of there in one piece. We didn't want to be in Uganda and be tortured, slaughtered, whatever. So we've made it this far, now we're in London. Where do we go from here? How long are we going to be here? The first week was very tense, getting into the second week we should have been getting used to that sort of life, because now there are a couple of other people who are in a similar situation that are in the camp with you.

So these were not the regular camps that were arranged throughout London, but you were getting some of these people with whatever situations of their own that have either flown out because of safety reasons, or have come here without proper documentation that didn't qualify for the so called bigger camps in the city of London, but in the detention camps where we were. Again, being the small community that we are and we were, you usually know who they are. If not, you've got family connections, you put your family trees together and say, "Oh yes, I know you, because I know this person, and this person..." so on and so forth. So here a couple of other families have come in, a couple of other kids have come in. Six weeks later some of them had moved on, some of them were still there while you're moving on, right? We finally got a message six weeks later, late that evening it was about ten thirty at night or something like that. "Okay, you're free to go."

Well, where are you going to go at ten thirty at night? Right? So you still have your mother, you're still with your dad, your mom, the baby, your sister, and yourself. Ten thirty at night on a cold winter night, right then I think its December or some nonsense like that. Time frame, I can't remember, but through the later part of the year and very cold. So having said that, through the six weeks a lot of the cleaning staff and kitchen staff, and people who used to come and deliver your food, which is your T.V. dinners, breakfasts, and so on and so forth. You make friends with them because you needed somebody to talk to. If there was a T.V. in there it was only available some hours and BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] was the only channel you were able to get because British television didn't have a lot of channels, right? Unlike what we have in Canada and when we first came to Toronto – I'll get there in a while – all you could get was BBC and at selected hours.

So that wasn't something that we did for the six weeks that we were there, but we made friends because of the staff that was there at the detention centre that used to come and go at different hours and so on. And one of the daytime staff was a lovely lady, she took a liking to mum and grandma and our baby sister. Because she said, you know what? These aren't conditions you should be living in, but having said that because we couldn't get out and none of them could come in, this lady took really good care in the sense that she would go out and bring formula for the baby and dad would pay her because by then with help he was able to make arrangements to have money on him, not large amounts but basic day-to-day needs I would imagine. And we would pay this lady to bring in the formula for the baby and so on and so forth. So what we were told that evening, "Okay, you can go." What do you do? But in the meantime this lady had given dad her phone number and said, "You know what, if you feel we can help you when the camp is shut down and after hours and restricted hours and so on..." because there were curfews there, right? Because even to go outside in that little locked in compound, you needed permission so that the security guard could open the door, and you they would watch you as you stood outside for a little while, well you can't be inside a building for six weeks without going outside for fresh air – nevermind cold air – but fresh air, right?

So we had a couple breaks like that, we couldn't open the windows there because everything was tightly sealed. So dad called her late at night, I can't remember the name of the lady but she was a lovely lady and he says, "Do you know what? We've just been told that we can leave, but where do we go and how?" he says, "I just don't know." We did have friends, but you didn't feel comfortable calling your friends that late at night, because they all had jobs and families and lives and so on, as much as they were all there and willing to help you. But sure enough, through that phone call to this lady, my dad also called one of his close friends that had been very well settled in London, he says, "You know what? We've just been released and don't know where to go, where do you recommend?" or something along that line, but anyways being the friend that he was, he also has passed on with my dad. Whatever the conversation was, the lady came to pick us up, we were then driven to my dad's friend's home and by this time it's almost one o'clock in the morning, freezing.

So here we are, at my uncle's place – because everybody's auntie and uncle – right? So here we are at dad's friends place, at uncle's place, the hospitality was phenomenal. One o'clock in the morning and they're laying out their routine, tea and coffee and snacks and everything else. Like oh my god, you need to get to work in the morning and you're doing all this, how are you going to do everything, right?

Settled in for the night, lovely little home, everybody shared rooms but it was comfort. It was comfort, it was a home, now you actually had windows that opened even though it was so cold. Now you had a private bathroom where you could actually go to the toilet properly and have a bath.

We were there for about a week or so and by this time dad's feeling a little uncomfortable because you're at your friends place and you're maximizing the hospitality, there's six of you, right? And you're at his home and he open-heartedly looked after you and you're thinking well we need to do something, we need to get out. But to get into the home office, which is the immigration building in London to be able to get your paperwork going so that you could apply to come to Canada, the timing is just not that fast, they work very slow. So you go to the home office early in the morning, you'd still be waiting there at the end of the day and your number still doesn't get called. So two weeks later we're still at uncle's place, by now my dad's thinking this is a bit too much, I can't be taking up so much of the hospitality from my friend, because he's got his own family.

My uncle, which is my father's little brother was in Liverpool, but because of the distance and because of his scheduling and so on we decided alright you know what, we need to take a train, go out to Liverpool, stay there, and try to do all the immigration stuff from there. So we got out of our friends home, which is dad's friend, took a train, went to Liverpool, the city was too small to accommodate what we needed to get done for immigration purposes because a lot of the work was getting done primarily through home office which was in London, it's not so much the sub office in Liverpool. So we decided alright you know what we need to leave here, we need to go back to London. So grandma stayed with my uncle. My mum's brother was already in England but we didn't want to be with them because they were already looking after my grandparents on my mum's side and a couple of other family members that had to flee Uganda to come and settle down, it was a full house. But you know, again, everybody's hearts were so big and so open, it didn't matter how cramped you were, everybody took care of each other. So here we are now leaving Liverpool to go to my uncle's place, my mum's brother in London, I think it was in Sussex or Surrey, I can't remember the actual suburb.

So now we're in London and again dad's back and forth to home office every day and then here comes this one fine day in February and everything worked out, we got our little papers looked after, and entry to come to Canada. So we're making all these travel arrangements and the time came to say goodbye now to your uncle and to the family that's there, and you've already gone through these emotional hurdles, we are between being released from camp to be with family and then we're still in transit because we're not settled, right?

The goodbyes there that February in 1973 are something I can still very clearly remember. My mother, she couldn't even say goodbye to her brother because they had just opened up their home and their hearts, everything to us without any accountability for anything, the two siblings could barely say goodbye. All they did was just cry like babies because we didn't know when we were going to see them again. My father was lost for words because if it hadn't been for my uncle looking after us, we don't know where we would have been. Because in Liverpool, as much as we had my dad's side of the family, it was a small city and we couldn't get our immigration looked after through there. Those few months there that we spent with my uncle and the goodbyes that were never said were the hardest thing, along with now starting to remember how we had to flee from Kampala to save our lives. We came to

Toronto, oh Shez what a frickin cold day. I... do you know it was a... just too, too damn cold. Oh god I didn't think I was going to do this."

Shezan: "No, it's totally fine."

Munira: "But you know, wow it's amazing how it'll get you, it'll still get you. All the good years you've had here, almost forty three years later, actually, no we're now in 2015, I'm talking 1973, so we're what? 44 years, almost 45. But you know you still see how your mom and your uncle are crying like babies."

Shezan: "You remember their faces."

Munira: "You see your dad's face that cannot show enough gratitude for looking after his entire family, right? Never mind just being my mom's brother but he treated my dad as if he was one of the siblings. There was never any accountability, as I said. That afternoon trying to say goodbye to depart from London to come to Canada, oh it's still there very strong, very strong. So we left home – and I say home, because it was our home – we left home, got to Heathrow airport, did the routine check in and whatever parents had to do to get you on board. At this time my grandmother was still in Liverpool, she was not going to travel with us. She decided for family reasons we decided my grandma was going to stay with my uncle in Liverpool.

So here's the five of us now leaving London to come to Canada. Well, this time getting on the plane was not a big deal [Laughter] because now you've had experience, right? So that was fine, so that's all done. We got on the plane, I think it was out of Heathrow, stop in Paris, then straight on to Toronto from there, or something like that. Got here – now I don't know if it was February 6th or February 16th, but anyway it was in 1973, in February we actually landed in Toronto. A frickin cold day, now here you are brand new, at least in some parts of London your parents are familiar with it, right? But you're in Canada, in Toronto. Cold, you could actually see your breath which is something we'd not seen. Because even the month we were in London while we're travelling around and doing the sight-seeing and so on and so forth. You never saw your breath because it was cold but not that cold. You come here, you hear something like, oh yeah its minus thirty six degrees or something to that low level of cold, you have no idea what that feeling is going to be like, right?

So you're standing at the departure terminal there and you need to hail a taxi and you can see your breath, and you're thinking, well I don't smoke, what am I seeing here? Because normally you see that when you see a smoker, right? And my sister and I are looking at each other and we're thinking, oh, this is fun. We can see our... we're not smoking but we look like we're smoking. You know, silly little kids. Here I am maybe almost twelve, and here she is almost seven or eight or something like that and I'm looking up at my parents and my parents are looking at each other, like what in the hell did we do? Did we really want to come to Canada? It's so cold and my mom's still holding my baby sister who is now about nine or ten months old and they're thinking, did we really want to do this? So you get in a taxi and they drop you at a hotel which is arranged through your landed status and you get to the hotel and it's this cold and this whole few hours of travelling and so on and so forth, but you need to get some

formula for the baby and you want to eat something yourself. I mean yeah, you get something on the plane but it's not what you're used to.

So dad goes down into the lobby to try and find out where we can get some food and so on and so forth and you know with the lightweight clothing that we had, the winters in England were not as cold as what we now have in Canada, right? So coming back to the clothing part, when we were leaving Uganda it was just your routine regular clothes. What an experience Paris was, right? What an experience detention camp was, getting to know the cold weather. But holy crap what an experience it was coming to Toronto, or rather coming to Canada, landing in Toronto to now realize what it is to have minus temperatures, and this is like minus thirty six degrees – or that's what we were told – but it could have been a lot colder, I don't know for sure. They didn't say anything about wind chill or stuff like that, or I don't know..."

Shezan: "At that point it wouldn't have mattered."

Munira: "The fact is it was frickin cold, right? So dad, he was trying to figure out how to get food and so on and so forth, so I guess they gave him whatever directions to the closest grocery store. Well you know what, you're on foot. You're not going to hail a cab, right? You have some money on your own, you receive a small allowance to get you started, but you have no idea what it's going to cost, you still are trying to grasp what the currency value is or how it works and the cost value and so on, so anyway those thoughts probably went through my dad's mind, but I'm just thinking he may have calculated some of that.

So here he is walking out that late at night now, it's probably eight or nine o'clock at night to go find food for us to eat and try and get some formula or milk or something for the baby. He got back to the hotel about ten-ish or something like that, looked like an ice cube because again the clothing was not adequate, you have a winter coat which is English standard, you have a tuque which is you know, just your regular tuque. You're wearing gloves that are barely going to keep you warm, well as far as leggings you have your regular socks and shoes, you know. First of all, now when I think back I don't know how he even walked, because when he came back to the hotel with food he was like an ice cube, just frozen, but he was still moving. And do you know, he didn't even blink an eye. You could see the tears that had iced up on his face, right? Because of the cold. So it was a suite, there was a little fridge and a stove and a sink there. And the little cabinets there had some dishes and stuff like that, put the food in the oven and warmed it up. Sat there, and I could see my dad starting to..."

Shezan: "To fall..."

Munira: "Well to fall because of exhaustion of being out in the cold, never mind the jetlag and all of that nonsense and the time change too, right? Because now you've got the time zones that you've changed as well, and he's defrosting from being an ice cube, and the colour is gradually coming from being that stone hard cold that you are. We ate a little bit, or we probably didn't eat and we just slept. We slept. Because now you know what? You're not sharing the hospitality of your uncle's home, of having mattresses and beds and whatever, the humbleness of what went on there, being there to where you are now. Here you are the five of you all alone in a new country, in a new city, in this hotel room that

had beds that you could individually sleep on. Fell asleep, next morning dad made some phone calls because we already knew some people that had already settled here because by September to February, well September to February of '73, people are already coming by and settled down and so on.

So we had some contacts that we made through long distance phone calls, local mail from England to Canada and so on, and you exchange phone numbers and things. So dad called my aunt, which is my father's sister. She couldn't wait to get on the subway to come meet with us, because when you left Uganda you had no idea when you were going to see anybody, right? And having left the way we had to leave, none of my father's family knew that we were leaving. My mother's family because of my uncle in downtown Kampala, and that was all hush-hush. He was the only one at that time who knew that we were leaving. Whatever code words you used back in those months to say, alright you know what, this one and this one have already departed and left Kampala and they're safe and they're in transit somewhere was all anybody knew.

So here she is coming to visit us at a hotel room and of course the first things first always, its tears and tears and tears, because you don't know. You don't know whether you've got to see anybody or whether anybody's healthy and around and got away okay and... so there's the tears and then of course what's happening with ma, which is my grandmother because my aunt wanted to know where her mother is, right? So she's safe, she's in Liverpool with my uncle, my father's younger brother. So there's that catching up to do and then trying to get caught up with okay, you're here, what's happening with the rest of the families? You know, the other relatives, your other uncles and your aunts and everybody else. And my father had an older sister that was then sent to New York from Kampala, because again with age and the lack of documents for immigration purposes, they couldn't exactly apply to get in to apply for Canadian residence, so they were sent through the United Nations where Prince Sadruddin was leading the United Nations, they were in New York.

So this is how we found out from my aunt that morning, the cold February night after we had a good night sleep and then here she is the next morning that you know what, now we're starting to place where everybody is. Because even while you were in London and you're starting to place people, you don't genuinely know and properly know where everybody is. So this is how we're getting caught up and spent a few hours together that morning and my cousin, my aunt's son gave my dad a little bit of knowledge of what was happening in the neighbourhood, because we didn't know how long we were going to be in a hotel because from here on, the first thing you wanted to do is get your own home now, right? But you also had to deal with the Canadian offices here to try and guide you with, okay these are the opportunities available to you, what kinds of housing are available to you with the budget, because you still don't have a job. You still have your little savings but you don't want to deplete all of that before you know where you're going to end – or rather, where you're going to start, where you end all support from the various levels of government.

So my cousin was chatting with my dad about all of these little locations and areas, and then just familiarizing dad with the neighbourhood and so on. So then here's now... I think when we arrived on February 6th, 16th, a Friday night, and they came to see us the Saturday morning. So now here's Sunday, here's a whole day you're just sitting there, it's too damn cold, you don't want to go out because you don't have clothing for it, you stand there outside and you think you're smoking, but that wasn't funny

anymore because it was just too cold to be outside. But how long do you sit in a hotel room and not be able to go out, you want to run around, you want to do things, right? So here's the difference of a T.V. here in Canada versus T.V. in London, now it's no longer just the BBC one channel and then restricted times and so on and so forth. You have this T.V. and the hotel room has cable and it gives you like five or six channels, my god, you know it's fabulous. So you have these... the tiny talent show and being the age that we were, we're getting a kick out of it, watching all these kids doing their little performances from whatever classes they were taking and they were performing on the show.

So you're watching T.V. Sunday afternoon, come Sunday evening, you've got some news that you're getting caught up on, I haven't got a clue what this news is all about, right? But it's something your parents are very interested in because now this is going to be our home, right? We're going to live here so you need to get familiar and get yourself used to way of life and getting caught up in the local issues around here. And you're thinking oh, why do they want to watch the news? You could flip on another channel but you had to walk up to the T.V. to turn the dial to turn it to the next channel. So anyway, all that... come Monday morning dad's out, you're waiting in a hotel and you don't know what's happening. In the mean time mom's saying, "Well, you know what? We need to find a school. It's time you went to school."

Now here's almost half a year gone by... we haven't been to school, right? In England there was no point, because they wouldn't even look at you because you weren't going to live there, right? Plus you were in between school semesters, what is known as a school year there, they're not going to enroll you as a student because you're going to up and go in a few weeks or whenever your papers are ready to move to Canada. So we hadn't had schooling in almost half a year, right? So that's six months of no school and you're thinking ah, not so bad. But now, you know what? The real world begins. Not that we didn't have the real world, but that wasn't what a normal world is all about, right?

That transit and getting out of Uganda and now finally we're getting together in Toronto and your parents want to settle and make a life and a future for you. Says mum, "We need to find a school, we need to walk around, we need to do this, we need to do that." As dad's heading off to do whatever he has to do with immigration offices here to find a job, see where housing is available, we were walking around the neighbourhood to see if we can find a school and talk to the principal there and get enrolled. And again, the neighbouring school from this downtown hotel that we were in, they weren't discouraging but they explained to us how the school year works in Canada versus the school year works in the British system, and also in Uganda we had the British system as well. So while you're already there through the month of February and in March you have March break, it didn't make sense to enroll you in a downtown school when you don't even know if you're going to live in the downtown area, or where you're going to live, where housing was appropriate or where it's going to be available. They decided they weren't going to enroll us. So this is now three, four weeks later, we're still in a hotel downtown Toronto, dad's found a job, now looking for an apartment, because of course you're not going to buy your first house, you're still a new immigrant, right? But everywhere you went into an apartment building to apply for a unit, they wouldn't lease you a unit because you wanted to have a two bedroom for the cheapest amount of rent for a family of five, so here's a couple and three kids. What are the guidelines here? If you have three kids, you have to have a three bedroom apartment, because the

parents need a place and of course the baby and kids, right? Couldn't find a place within a reasonable budget, or it was a no-pet building.

Now this is how it was back in those years, right? Finally there was an apartment that did become available to us, it was a three bedroom, it was within dad's budget, commute was quite the distance because this apartment was in the Don Mills and Sheppard area, the old Fairview Mall, where eventually the little khane and everything started. So we finally got an apartment and moved out of the hotel, went there and March break was over, school was just up the road from where our building is, so we were finally enrolled in school after March break, but then only to find out by mid-June you were going to be out for summer for two and a half months so we're thinking, hey, you know what? This isn't a bad deal, we didn't go to school for half a year, maybe five weeks of school between April and mid-June and then we're off for two and a half months, how good is it going to get, right? Boy oh boy. In the meantime here's dad commuting from Don Mills in Sheppard to downtown, in the sales field, but not quite what he was comfortable with because that wasn't the product type that he always catered to."

Shezan: "Was he in car sales?"

Munira: "No, my dad was always in the life insurance sales. So when we were in Uganda all those good years, he sold life insurance with Prudential of England and he had a lot of entrepreneurial connections with selling beauty products, selling L'Oréal hair products. He did a lot of school supplies, his biggest contact was with Bic ball pens. And in those days you didn't just see a blue ball pen, it was a miracle if you had a black ball pen that you were holding in your hand, in those Ugandan days, right? And then when they had the red and green it was like, whoa! Multicolours! So my dad had all of those channels in Uganda, so being in that background and life insurance in his primary background. With the sales position that he got here, it was just silverware, and it was a sales job, nonetheless. But it wasn't a product that he was comfortable with, and it didn't satisfy what he wanted to do. He through the silverware channel met a gentleman from Korea and they got to talking and my dad says to him, you know what? I need to do something better.

And this Korean gentleman was already a salesman at Sunlife of Canada, back then in those days, it's now known as Sunlife Financial. But back in those years it was Sunlife of Canada. He says, "You know what? I want to take you somewhere." So dad was introduced to Sunlife through this gentleman, this gentleman then became a very good colleague, friend, because dad ended up being at the same branch of Sunlife as this gentleman. Beautiful. Now, this is my dad's comfort zone. But where do you start? We're all new immigrants, who's got the money?

Right? But you still have a family to feed, you've got rent to pay, you don't want to sell silverware anymore, you don't have a car. TTC [Toronto Transit Commission] in those days was very inexpensive, for adults you only paid a quarter. For us kids you only paid a dime, which is the size of a subway token. The prices are phenomenal now compared to back in those days, but for an adult for a quarter and for dad to commute putting in quarters to go see prospective clients and to build a business and its all commission income, sales in life insurance is always commission, right? It's never base pay. How many quarters do you put away before you have a budget enough to pay your rent, to bring in food, to build your family, because now your baby is a year old. It's no longer just formula and now baby food starts,

that's a little added extra in your routine food that you pick up. The struggling was there, but it was all in joy for him because he's providing for his family, right? Gradually a car comes in because this gentleman that dad bought the car from was a car salesman that we had known from Uganda. Right? So again you're working, now you're supporting each other and new people in the country for your new relationships or you knew directly of back in Uganda. Bought his first car, it was a Chrysler Plymouth."

Shezan: "Okay, yeah."

Munira: "Right? This neon green, a green hard top. I'm thinking, my god, we're going to stand out in a crowd for sure. But it was lovely, you know, your dad has a car."

Shezan: "Those things are pretty big."

Munira: "Huge, huge, cars, right? So now you're no longer in and out of a bus, up and down subways, you know as much as you're enjoying just putting in a dime every time you got on the bus or took a subway. But it was fun, it was fun to have a car. You know, because now you're being driven around, but then you have insurance on cars right? Auto insurance is mandatory because you can't drive a car unless you buy auto insurance. So again you know there's a revamping of your budget and you're thinking, okay, you need insurance for the car, you need payments. You've still got rent, you've still got food, and other bare necessities, you're on commission and your gas money is costing you a fortune, and the odd place where you did have to park, my god it hit the belt, because it was way out of your budget.

Shezan: "Yeah because I guess your dad was used to paying fifty cents round trip."

Munira: "Exactly. Yeah, but now there's a car, right? You need to put gas in the car because it won't work. Put gas in there, and of course there's car maintenance as the mileage keeps going up you need to go for an oil change, otherwise you're going to end up with damages and the car's not going to work. So these are things that you – when I say you, I mean myself as a teenager – was then starting to learn from her dad, that things don't come easy, you've got to work hard. But as long as you're motivated and you're willing to put in the effort, your achievements are endless. But if you've got to hold back, you're not going to have what your goals are, because you're not willing to go and give it your utmost to continue to grow.

So here we are now, winter's coming back. It's now September, you're getting enrolled into school and you're thinking wow, I've had two and a half months off this summer. I've enjoyed it because there's a pool in the backyard of our building, right? Because most apartment buildings have a swimming pool."

Shezan: "It's hot again."

Munira: "Yeah, you've enjoyed the summer, you don't have to go to school except for those five weeks between April and the middle of June and you're thinking, I have to go to school? The real world was now starting for us, never mind my parents, right? So we got enrolled in school, you're meeting all these new friends, you're getting into a whole new system of how the school works, compared to the way school was in Uganda, exciting and yet a little overwhelming. Very different because you have lockers here, you didn't have lockers back home, you took everything in your little backpack – well, not a backpack because we didn't have those – but in a little bag and you tucked it under your chair, or you

would slide it under your desk because that's how we did things there. We didn't need coats and jackets and lockers and so on and so forth, and you're given this lock by your principal and he teaches you how to turn the knobs so you can have the combination.

So you get the locker assigned to you and sure enough, in the morning you know your combination, by the afternoon when you need to go back to your locker you have no idea what it was! Because you've had this day of excitement of going from class to class, getting to know new friends, meeting teachers, and you're also thinking, okay the English here is a bit different compared to the English we spoke in Uganda. Not in the sense that the words are any different, but the accent. Because over there you either had the African accent or you had some that had the British accent. Here you've got the Canadian accent and its, wow, this is now permanent, coming before summer break was a novelty actually because it didn't seem like it was real life, right? But now its real life, you're actually in school, pull up your socks. The real world has begun.

So you've got that to do, and you're watching your father establish himself, accomplish things. And this is, again, with a lot of help from the local community because you're now also connecting with people on a broader scale that you knew from back home that are new immigrants here and you're showing them the advantages of life insurance as different from being back home, and they're all falling for it, right? And when I say falling for it, it's a very terrible word to use, but because you have economical products to buy life insurance for your family protection, almost everybody dad approached, or almost everybody that knew my dad was in the business because of past relationships. It was nice for my dad because he grew his client base from a lot of the people that we knew from Uganda and word of mouth because you use your... well I wouldn't say you're using it, your dad's name gets shared with everyone else that had known of him, oh okay, well we'll but from him. Which is lovely, right?

And things were happening, so here we are, now its 1976, dad's established himself at the business here at Sunlife. And his branch manager, fabulous man from a Jewish background, again a lot like we are. They're very community focused, very driven, large goals, and a continued drive to accomplish your goals. And this man had fabulous encouragement and support and all the good things. He said to dad, he said, "You know what," and he used to call my dad Bob in those days because to pronounce our names was a bit of a task. And even today some of us have shorter names or nicknames, not always our given birth names to be addressed with. "Bob," he says, "You know what? It's time for you to buy a new car." Well, what about the Plymouth? It's been keeping me going, it's taken care of a lot of my needs. "No, no," he says, "You need luxury." But he says, "Before you do that, you need to buy a home." You've got your family established and the kids are in school and you know what? It's great, but you need a home, you need another car, and you need to continue to grow. Dad was also already involved with the council here, the Aga Khan Council, and the Aga Khan's first visit was in the air in 1976. It was in the air, and new immigrants, how are we going to do this? You're planning from like this time onwards, and then in dad's personal mind he's thinking, "Okay, my manager is pushing me to buy a new home, a new car, and I've got this community work, how is it all going to work? Mum didn't work because we decided we're going to be a one income family, because us kids were still very young. And dad was of the mind frame that you need to have values from home..."

Shezan: "Yeah, and Fifi was still young..."

Munira: “She was now three or four year’s old, right? But it all was happening. It was all happening. So my dad bought our first home in 1976. Yeah, I think it was September of ’76 or something like that and the excitement of backing out of the apartment that you’ve grown into your home, and it has a swimming pool in the backyard, wow! But you’ve got to wait til next summer because you can’t use it with the fall coming in, but you’re thinking, wow, we have a home, we have a car, we’re going to go into a new school and all that, right? So we move into our first home come the following year, 1977 dads thinking okay, you know what? So we’ve settled in, budgeting, accommodating a mortgage, time to get the car the manager’s been pushing me into. He bought a Cadillac, a luxury car [Laughter] and my dad’s always had a thing for cars, because as I mentioned in Kampala he used to race mini rallies, do the local rallies over there. He’d always wanted to get into the East African Safari Rally, but given the local politics he never made it that far, but he did a lot of local rallies so he’s packing for cars. Now it’s becoming a fashionable luxury car, right?”

So the Plymouth had to go and here comes this Cadillac, 1977 royal blue, humongous car, the size of your living room for heaven’s sake, and it’s got all this plush seating and padded seats and cushions and you’re thinking wow, you know what? I’d rather spend my days in the car. But he needs it to get to clients and to continue to work and so on. So here we are, right? And then word comes in that the Aga Khan is coming in sometime through to 1978 and you’re thinking, alright I’m in the community, I want to make sure that I’m able to do what I can to continue my service with the community but I need to continue to have financial support, because now there’s not just the wife and the three kids, there’s the food and the clothing and the mortgage, plus the car and the insurance is a bit higher, and the frickin gas! That was a guzzler. Pardon my words, but the Cadillac really was a guzzler.”

Shezan: “Oh, yeah. Absolutely, yeah.”

Munira: “It took in more than the mileage should have produced right? But anyway, that was also to be driven and continue to accomplish more and more and it made you truly rethink your goals and you set larger goals and you drove and you literally drove your ambition to the extreme. So here’s the Aga Khan’s first visit in November of 1978 if I recall, I’m pretty sure it was November because it was cold, by this time we also had grandma come to live with us in Toronto. She left my uncle in Liverpool and she came here, she was already with us at the house I should say. And then from a parent’s point of view, that little bit of happiness inside her is like, alright, you know what? From what I saw when we had to flee Kampala, to what I see my son doing here, and now we’re going to see the Aga Khan in a new country, you know? So this was all heaven to her. And the pride in her, wow, my son’s been able to do all this in this short span of time.

If you look at 1972, to getting here in February 1973 and now you’re approaching approximately November 1978 and your son has established and he’s part of the council, back in Uganda if you were part of the council you were one of the big guys, right? For my dad to be a self-made individual with certain families that we had in Uganda, were all bug buys with big names and titles and so on. My dad was just a little guy, you know, he was self-made, so for my grandmother that was heaven, her son has actually done all this, right? So we have the Aga Khan come here, everybody’s getting together at the exhibition centre, because that’s where it was all set up, and it was just something else. Words can’t describe what it was, because words can never describe what you’re going through in terms of anxiety

and tension that you had for the transition of Kampala to get to where we were then in Nairobi, and then England in the detention camp and all that crap.

Anyways, so now we're here and it's all happening, dad was a member of the youth of the Ismaili Council for Toronto at that time, played a big role in terms of being able to volunteer his time and prep them to set up for the whole of the trip for the Aga Khan here while he was in Toronto. So that was done and things were starting to happen, and also because of that you get to know a broader base of people that are here now in Toronto, along with also here in Ontario, right? Your business, geographic region, is expanding, because again you have relationships back home, word of mouth, referrals.

So you're travelling a little bit more and you're thinking alright, this car is really costing me a lot of money. So he bought a second car. So mom could use this for her part time needs instead of getting on the bus, if grandma needed to go to the doctor, putting them both on the bus was a bit too much. So we ended up then calling this car the hunk of junk. It was huge. So dad found another car, I can't remember exactly what it was, but it was a luxury car and my memory fails. But he had another car and mum had this one, the old hunk of junk, and he was travelling a lot more. Not that we didn't have enough family time together, but there were some days when his business hours were a lot longer than routine schedules could allow for us to have family time together.

Years went by, now its 1982, he's appointed to be the regional president for the Ontario council for the Aga Khan here in Toronto, right? And this is also now the Aga Khan's silver jubilee and my dad was... you know what? He was very fortunate in many ways. So by this time of course the branch manager is fully aware of the commitment my dad had in the community, he'd seen how my dad's business was growing because of support from the local community, business was good and the manager... I'm reluctant to use his name, but a fabulous individual. He said to my dad, "Bob," he said, "Go, your clients will be looked after." He says, "Go, I know what this means to you. Take the time, plan, prep, do whatever you have to do for hosting the Aga Khan when he comes to Toronto. Because also for this manager, for him there was a great degree of pride because he gets to walk around town and say you know what, one of my sales people is now very prominent, not only as an established salesperson here at my branch at Sunlife, but he's also made a mark in the community. He's going to be hosting the Aga Khan when he comes to Toronto for a memorable time of his life, he's celebrating his 25th anniversary, right? We call it silver jubilee.

So all of that happened and it all just went you know, beautifully. Lots of community support, all the volunteerism, on the business side everybody was content. So that came and went. Now it's around 1985-86, dad decided that the home that we had in Scarborough, we were all getting a bit too old and that home was just cramping everybody, right? Grandmas with us, which is fabulous, we're all growing up, the baby is no longer a baby anymore, she's now almost ten, eleven, somewhere around there, right? It's time to move, and it's still the same branch manager, fabulous, right? So dad's sharing these thoughts with him and then he's saying, "Yep, okay Bob, go for it. Uproot, it's time for you to buy another home."

So what happens? Dad makes a commitment, this time we're not going to buy a lived in home, we're going for a brand new home. So this is all between 1985 and 1986, and all that excitement, added

pressure financially as well, right? Because now you're buying a bigger home, and it's a brand new home so you not only take whatever standard features they give you in a home that they build, but you're thinking alright you know what? I'm at an age now where this is probably going to be my last home that I purchase because then I'm going to be thinking towards retirement, should we do upgrades? Shouldn't we do upgrades, that kind of thing? Yeah, took a few upgrades because in those days to have carpeting was fabulous, hardwood floors... well we didn't know as much about allergies and environment still in the eighties, right? So you take the upgraded carpeting that they're offering to you and you're going for these ceramic tiles and kitchen, and you're thinking okay I can get marble tops and floors, anyways all these little luxuries because now you're in a comfortable position where you can say, you know what? I want these little things.

Not that we had to scrounge in any way, because my dad was always able to provide for us, without any hesitation. He never once said, "No, we can't afford it." He may have made sacrifices within himself, but Shez he never once said, "No, we can't do it." We were always given everything. In fact, some of our friends envied us because I was driving a car, I had my own car! Because by then we had three cars in the family. Mom still had the hunk of junk, that was the car the Plymouth it was a scamp by that time. And dad had bought his last car, again a luxury car, it was a Mercedes. But that was his utmost dream, right?

Everything was happening, he had that, so there's the house now, so come 1986 we're coming out of the first Canadian home that we had to the newly built home that we're having to move into, and good things are happening. And again, there's that emotion in you and some emotional feelings as well. And you're thinking to yourself, where was I back in 1972, 1973, to where I am now in 1986? We're packing out of our first Canadian home to now move into our new home. Your grandma is thanking her blessings, and she's saying, "Wow, look at what my son has come up with." We've come such a long way from where we thought there was no tomorrow left for us. So here we are packing out of the old house, going into the new house, and it's a whole new neighbourhood because through the eighties the area of Markham was still a lot of farmland, and we were established in Scarborough. Scarborough was, wow, heaven for people. You know? Scarborough was like Oakville, if you had a home in Scarborough people would say, "Wow! You live in Scarborough?" but now we're moving up to Markham which is like, up in the boonies. You know anything north of Finch in those days was far, you're moving up to Markham? Oh my god, all the way up there in the farms? Like come on, you know?

And the biggest novelty through 1985 and 1986 as we were watching our house being built was driving through old Unionville on Main Street. It was like, wow, we're going to live up here? Because that was a tiny, happening street, right? Main Street Unionville, my god. And at the end of the road there was a tiny pond and it was called Toogood Pond, and you're thinking, I'm going to be moving up here, I'm going to be living in Markham. I've got this fabulous little hub of a neighbourhood compared to the hustle and bustle of Scarborough, with the corner of Kennedy and Sheppard and things of that nature. So you get up here and the first thing is, it's taking me forever to get to work, right? Because Markham transit didn't exist, TTC didn't go North of Steele, so unless you had a car, you weren't doing anything in the local area of Markham. So having said that, while we were still in Scarborough we still had three

cars, that was a major asset. So here we are '86, moved into our home up in Markham and everything is going beautifully.

A year later Salim and I are married so I barely had enough time to live in our so called brand new home, right? And my grandmother is saying to my dad, "Yes as much as they're hanging around they should be married," and so on and so forth. There was a little pressure because grandmas didn't like you hanging around with boys, you had to be a couple. But it was grandmas on both sides of the family. Even Salim's grandma, when she found out that Salim and I were seeing each other, and again there was that family bond – get them married. So less than a year later Shez, I was married and I was on my own! I didn't have enough time in our new home, but again things were happening. Dad was establishing himself yet again and growing and so on. He by now had become a branch manager at the Sunlife office, things were happening. '92 was then approaching with the Aga Khan visit back into Canada, this time dad was still a part of the council and was given the opportunity again to be one of the hosts for the visit in 1992. That happened, sadly enough my grandmother had passed away by this time, she passed away in 1990 or... 1990. So grandma's gone.

By this time we're thinking alright you know what, what do we do with the house? Because now it's becoming too large, grandma's not there, I'm not there. Nazeera she was either married by then or close to getting married... no, she was married by then. She'd already moved to Nairobi because she got married in April of '91. Moved to Nairobi to be with Karim's family. Fifi was the only one home and shortly after that Fifi was offered a job contact to move to Switzerland. Yeah, so we're thinking this is all lovely. No hang on Fifi was... her contract was later. It wasn't in the early '90s. But anyways the house is starting to be too big. Dad was enjoying it nonetheless because you know what, that was his dream home. That was a home built from scratch to personal preferences, right? So we're still there with the house, first grandchild comes along, right? Then the second grandchild comes along, which is lovely and now we're into 1996, '97, I had joined my dad at Sunlife in 1989, it was also a passion of his to have one of us to be a successor to his business, right? Nazeera was too young, she had other goals. I had goals to be in the financial business, but more on the legal side, and then I also had a second goal which was more on the personal interest, I wanted to always get into fashion designing and dad's theory was, no. No."

Shezan: "Not happening."

Munira: "Right? Yeah. But anyways, I joined Sunlife in 1989, my dad of course was my mentor. Because he says to me, you know what, as a lawyer, in family law you're going to have to bill people and they're dealing with pain. [Inaudible] but here you are doing family law without the diploma. But he says as long as you have your license and you can sell life insurance in Ontario, you're going to do mega, mega good things to the families that buy from you. I thought my god you know what? At my age, what am I going to do in the life insurance business? Like first of all, so we have policies with my dad. I had my personal policy that I was paying my own monthly premium out of my checking account and it was... ugh, you know? I didn't fully understand the value of what it was.

But my dad always being the life insurance person that he was, really understood the value in more ways than one, it's not just a policy that you buy so when you die your family has support. But do you

know now when I talk about financials and what we've gone through in Uganda when we left and went to Nairobi and all of that, went to Surrey and were helped, we had cash values in our financial policies in Uganda in those days, that is what helped my dad in terms of immediate financial need. He was able to withdraw those cash values to be able to then pay the friends that helped him immediately, for the air tickets out of Kampala to Nairobi, and then from Nairobi my cousin helped us to get us into London and then the little bit of allowance we had that was also through the surplus of cash values that were in those policies, of course by now this policy has surrendered because we depleted everything to survive right? And until I got in and I learned the products did I then truly appreciate and realize the value of what had brought us to where we are.

So I did, I did join Sunlife, I had a solid eleven years of my dad mentoring me in the business and here we are now in 1997, my dad has his heart attack. It was a mild heart attack, but he had a heart attack. Health issues sometimes can be something that we're in denial about..."

Shezan: "Yeah."

Munira: "...So my dad being the tough man that he always was, was, is... I still say is. Karim had rushed into the hospital that morning when he was sick, just feeling that discomfort and then they called me a little later through the morning to say, do you know what? Dad's in the hospital... Karim called me, or was it my mom... one of the two. Anyway, "Dad's in the hospital, we're up here in Markham Stouffville [Hospital] so if you want to stop by..." because not knowing if he had meetings with clients that morning or whatever. I wasn't sure, because there was no indication that there was anything wrong, serious, he's there under observation, you know. We're waiting for the lab results to come in and so on and so forth.

So this, Shez, is exactly March 1, 1997. Okay... so he got to the hospital, the emerg[ency] let me in because immediate family, right? And so dad's saying to mom, "Okay, why don't you head on home because you have to go to khane. Because at that time they were also very fortunate that they were appointed to be Mukhisaheb, which was known as headquarters to Jamat khana at that time. And then mom's saying, "Okay well I'll come back and see you, maybe I'll pick you up and we can go to khane together." Sure, because they didn't know how long they were going to keep my dad, right? And so late afternoon comes in and mom hasn't come back to the hospital, I'm still there with my dad. There's no result yet from the lab so we're still in emerg waiting, right, not knowing what to do. Talking about this, that, and whatever, and dad saying, "Well okay, I may need to rest for a few days so let's make some notes of what you need to do when you get to the office," the usual stuff. Well you know what Shez? By now mom's already in khane, right? Because we're still in the hospital because there's no word of what's happening with my dad. It's about seven-ish and the nurse comes by – how are we doing for time?"

Shezan: "I'm in no rush, yeah, yeah, keep going."

Munira: "Really? Because I'm very detailed, but I am a very chatty person. So..."

Shezan: "It's better research!"

Munira: "Alright, thank you."

Shezan: "It's more helpful for me."

Munira: "I just want to make sure we're okay for time here."

Shezan: "Oh yeah, absolutely."

Munira: "So the nurse comes by and she says, "Mr. Dhanani, we're going to have to take you into ICU [Intensive Care Unit] and the doctor will come and meet with you and talk about the results. And dad's thinking, well why can't I just go into a regular room? Why ICU, right? Well the doctor will come and talk to you. So we figured alright, fine, maybe there aren't any rooms available, because Markham Stouffville at that time it was a brand new hospital."

Shezan: "Oh yeah, okay Markham Stouffville."

Munira: "Yeah, it may have been maybe I don't know... a few years old. My grandmother was a patient at Markham Stouffville Hospital the year that she passed away, so she was downstairs at continuing care for almost eleven and a half months, she died, she actually had a massive stroke which left her half body paralyzed. But because home care in those days was not very common, none of us are trained medically to take care of a body that's partially paralyzed. Dad decided for [Inaudible] we could accommodate her and pay the requirements to have her at home care, pardon me, continuing care at Markham Hospital. So this is back in 1990, by 1997 Markham Stouffville had been around for a few years but not a big hospital. So we thought alright, maybe they don't have enough beds or whatever. So we go up to ICU but anyways, they wouldn't let him up. They brought in another stretcher to wheel him up to ICU. So here we are on the second floor in the corner there where the ICU is and the doctor comes by and has a talk with dad, and there's a lot of medical terms going on. But the only word we understood was heart attack. And I'm looking at my dad, and he's looking at me after the doctor left the room and he's like, "Okay, you know what? You go home, don't say anything to mom. We'll all just have a good night sleep, you bring her back in the morning and we'll talk."

Shezan: "Go from there, yeah."

Munira: "And I'm thinking, you know what? Okay I've been selling insurance now for a few years, I know to be insurable you have to be in good health. What makes you uninsurable are illnesses like heart attacks, cancer, stroke, things of that nature. And then if you're a smoker or non-smoker, high blood pressure, or family history of diabetic and all that nonsense. And I'm thinking, why are you so calm? And why am I so calm? What is it we're missing over here, right? But because of his mind frame he never externally showed any pressure, but you could read his facial features, and my dad spoke very much with his eyes. But he still had that glow in his eyes as he was telling me, why don't you go home and let's all have a good night sleep, don't say anything to mom, and do you know what bring her in the morning and we'll talk. So here I am thinking, okay, fine.

So I left the hospital, went to our family home first because Nazeera and the kids were home and I'm telling Karim, my brother in law, "Dad's said don't say anything to mom, just bring her to the hospital in the morning and we'll talk, but the doctor's using words like heart attack." And Karim is saying to me, "You know Bibi," – I have a lot of nicknames – he says, "When I drove dad to the hospital this morning,

he didn't look good, because it wasn't just discomfort, he was literally holding his left shoulder." Now, I guess for Karim it was maybe something he'd seen in the past, right? Because he comes from the hospitality background, knows a lot of people, heard of a lot of illnesses, he says, "It didn't look good." So I said, "Alright, so mom comes home tonight," because mom was still at khane, "We won't say anything to her, we'll just say alright Bibi will take you to the hospital in the morning and then you and dad can talk about it." In the meantime as I was leaving the family home to go home to my place mom got home from khane. So here she is with Kamadisaheb and Kamadianima because they didn't feel it was comfortable for her to drive on her own having been at the hospital from early that morning, so they had picked her up to go to khane that night and dropped her off.

So mom got out of the car and she goes, "Well?" "Dad's there, he wants us to go in the morning and we'll talk." I didn't want to say anymore because mom had had such a long day and she felt alright, he's in the hospital, it's observation, she didn't think two... said goodbye to Kamadisaheb and Kamadianima in the driveway there and went into the house. And Kamadianima is such a lovely friend, so close to mom and they're still so lovely. I said to Kamadisaheb, I said, "You know, the doctors saying words like," by now I'm saying words, not word, "Of a heart attack. And dad doesn't want to say anything to mum, so even if you speak to her between now and tomorrow, please don't say anything to her, I'm taking mom to the hospital in the morning and then she and dad will talk." Kamadisaheb lost all expression, he was just lost for words and I could see his face just go very still. And Kamadianima was... should I say something? Shouldn't I say something? And I said goodnight, she rolled up the window and pulled out of the driveway, and I went home and that was it.

So the next morning I picked up mum and everything's fine, right? Because I'm not supposed to say anything. Got to the hospital and by now my dad actually has a proper room in ICU, it wasn't just out in the corridor, and it wasn't a hallway actually, it wasn't a separate area there were dividers instead of a proper room. So now in the morning he's actually in a proper room in the ICU and he's got an IV plugged into him and ICU had all these buttons and equipment and all that and you're looking and you're thinking, what's happening here? And I'm thinking okay... a heart attack, again I'm not supposed to say anything because we haven't talked to mum. Shez, we're sitting there and he's saying to my mom, "You know, we need to make some lifestyle changes, I need to look after my health. We may need to slow down a little bit in our social piece, I'll have to modify some of my business hours." And by now I'm wondering, okay, what am I hearing? And where are the words heart attack? Because again, I'm still not connecting this is my dad, this is my strength, my lifeline, right? Never mind him being in denial but even I was in denial, the words heart attack were being used but it's still not in me to the full extent that yes, your dad had a heart attack yesterday morning.

And he's telling me, he says, "Alright why don't you go down the hall and make some phone calls." This is to call my aunts, my dad's older sister and younger sister. My dad's older sister who ended up in New York back in those years now has been settled here in Toronto for the last little while. My dad's younger sister who was always here from the time she left Uganda, which is the one who came to see us in our downtown hotel room that frickin cold morning and the tears and all that. So I went to make these telephone calls, right? So here I am talking to my aunt and I said to her, "You know dad doesn't want you to run around, because it's quite the distance, and the hospital said no visitors for now, but

immediate family is okay.” And I said, “You are classified as immediate family but dad doesn’t want you to run around, we’ll keep you informed as to how he’s progressing.” My younger aunt says, “Oh I have to come see him, even if it means through the window.” She can be a little dramatic, but I learned a lot about that when my grandma was in the hospital for eleven and half months because my older aunt was very reasonable, but my younger aunt can dramatize quite a bit. She says, “Even if I can just see his face through the mirror or the window, whatever, I want to come.” And I’m sitting on the phone going, “Auntie, let’s just wait.” You know, I can empathize with her emotions, right? By now my uncle that we had lived in Liverpool with back in the early ‘70s, he’s a practical physician, he had come to Toronto but didn’t like the Canadian medical system compared to what he was used to in the UK and then had now established himself in the US.

So I called him. I said, “You know, uncle, we’re here in the hospital and it’s a heart attack.” But I didn’t realize the night before when I left my dad at the hospital, between him and the doctor that was looking after him in ICU, they called my uncle. Because my dad explained to the doctor my brother is a physician in the US, could we speak to him? And I didn’t know because my dad said, “Leave the room, go make these phone calls,” right? And I’m thinking alright if I’m calling my aunts I should call my uncle as well, right? So it’s very innocent. And again, the nicknames he says, “Yes, bhai, I know. I know it’s a heart attack and it’s to be taken seriously.”

By now Shez, it’s hit me. I’m thinking holy crap, he’s had a medical condition, he’s now a heart patient and now I’m starting to cry like my mom was crying in Uganda and like she had cried when she said goodbye to her... or when she was trying to say good bye to her brother in England in February of 1973. And I’m feeling that way and I’m thinking... my dad has had a heart attack. And he’s saying, “You know in the states we would do an angiogram right away.” He says, “The Canadian system, and that’s why I didn’t last there, is very different. Also the...” See we’ve got social benefits, medical care here, as long as you’ve got OHIP [Ontario Health Insurance Plan] you’re okay and your provincial plans will take care of you. In the US you pay as you go, right? So if you’ve got something major like this, you pay for it and get it done. Well here there’s a waiting list, and again Markham Stouffville still being a smaller hospital, they couldn’t do anything there right away. You’ve had a heart attack, we’re now going to talk about the next steps.

So the night before between the doctor, my dad, and my uncle, they’ve already talked about this. My uncle was just as angry as hell. He says, “If you’ve had a heart attack, you get the angiogram done, you don’t wait for it to settle because the arteries become very hard and it just becomes very difficult to do what we need to do next.” So he says, “Bhai, I know about it, it’s not a matter to be taken lightly, it’s serious. I’m actually making arrangements to be there in the next day or so.” And I’m holding the phone Shez and I’m crying and I’m thinking, what am I missing here? So the words heart attack are starting to sink into me and it’s now my father... and my uncle was trying to say things to me and I hadn’t a clue and yet when I’m doing life insurance applications and I’m taking medical history down and I’m writing everything down, but it doesn’t connect the same way for some reason, right?

So here we are now Sunday afternoon and I’ve had this talk with my uncle and I am swelled up with tears and I’m thinking, I don’t know how much my dad has said to my mom now, right? Because he was mincing all his words while I was still in the room with them until he told me to leave the room and

make these phone calls. So I go back into the room and my mom is in shock, "It's a heart attack," she says as I walk in. And my dad's nodding his head and his eyes are still glowing because he spoke with his eyes, as I say. His facial expressions were his means. He was very low tone, he wasn't monotone, but he spoke very low but when he wanted to be firm there was a lot of meekness that went into his voice. And he's in his bed sitting upright and he's nodding at me in the no direction and his eyes are glowing, and I guess he could see that I'd been crying and I'm now hearing my mom say this and there was still denial. So we sat there for a few minutes, a lot of silence and the nurse comes by and she says, "Okay, Mr. Dhanani we have some tests that are going to be scheduled just so you know the orderly will come and wheel you back and forth depending on where we're going to take you in the hospital. It may not all happen today, but starting tomorrow we're going to start our first test." And okay, fine. And then dad's saying to mom, "You know, it's time for you to go home now. You need to get ready to go to khane." Duty calls, right?

And that was his passion. His community service was his passion, and mom is like, "No, why don't I call Kamadiasaheb and they can find somebody to sit in for us, I don't want to go, I don't feel like going." And he's, "No, you need to go, you need to do a prayer for me as well." So here we left the hospital because I have to drive mom home, right? I picked her up to bring her here. So in the car she said to me, she says, "Why wasn't he just getting to the point? Why wouldn't he just tell me he had a heart attack? You know he's sitting there giving me all this crap about lifestyle changes and cut down our social life stuff for a while." And I said, "Do you know, mom, uncle said to me that it's not something to be taken lightly, he's trying to get here in the next couple of days. According to him, it's serious. Again, you and I don't understand these things."

So I dropped her home, she did what she had to do, went to khane, whatever. I went back to the hospital and I'm sitting there, my dad's you know, "Okay let's make notes now, this is what you're going to have to do. He says, "I'm going to be okay." Because he could tell, I couldn't hold myself, right? He said, "We're going to be okay." So Shez here I am making notes, right? What to do at the office on Monday, he's saying to me, by then he'd stepped down from his management position. He wanted to dedicate himself more towards the community and he was still very passionate about business, but he found balance in being with the community equally in the business, and also being a family man at the same time. He was the greatest grandfather, the girls adored him, like I said to you, my Allahnah the little pouf that she was would come home and wouldn't even look at my mum, she would dash up the staircase, "I want baba, where's baba?" So he was a fabulous grandfather, his granddaughters adored him for the short time they had with him because my Ara was what was it, five at that time. No... she was four when he had the heart attack and Allahnah was just two, and you know I'm thinking to myself, my god, what's going on here, right? So I'm making these notes and I'm back in the office on Monday and meanwhile he's saying to me, "Don't say anything to anyone at the office if they ask where I am." And I'm thinking, something here is just not connecting, right?

At the same time, I'm in shock here, so I'm just go, go, go like an ever running battery that's just going, right? Because somehow there's this energy that comes into you and I'm going, going, going. So Monday goes by, he was taken down for a few tests at the lab, my uncles calling, he's going to be there by Tuesday, we're picking up uncle, back at the hospital Tuesday. Dad's sending me away to the office to

take care of things and make sure you're there for clients, phone calls and everything else. By Friday dad is now moved out of ICU which is a big relief into a regular room, right? And this is Friday afternoon and my uncle is still struggling at the hospital to get the angiogram done because, again in the US once you've been told you've had a heart attack you do an angiogram, you don't wait. But you know, the first angiogram appointment that was available to my dad was not until a month later, so that wasn't going to happen until April and my uncle is just hitting the roof, so my uncle was here within the first week on a Friday afternoon, we're in a regular room and you're telling me the angiogram is not going to be done until the first week of April? Come on, you know? And my dad was still in denial, right? Walking around and my uncle is trying to calm down and says, "Okay when you walk, go a little slower. Don't walk at your usual pace," because when my dad walked it was almost like a speed walk, it wasn't just a normal walk, it's just how he was. So even if his body didn't work he was walking fast.

So we're sitting there and then by Sunday they released my dad, so this is from Sunday to Sunday, you know. He's running up the staircase and charging around and my uncle's like, "Do you know something? You need to slow down." He says, "You need to take one step at a time, let your mind slow your legs down," because we don't look at it the same way, but my uncle's a doctor, he's done all this with patients, his brother is now becoming an indirect patient, too. And he's trying to explain to my dad about certain dietary habits and so on, but having said that my dad was always very careful in terms of his diet. You know he wasn't a junk food eater, unlike the rest of us, and once in a while he wouldn't say his caught us but he would see us having junk food between your high sugars and your high salts and all that crap. And he would laugh and say, "You know what? Back away or just do small portions," yet on his side, he would maybe take a spoonful of something very sweet or something very salty but he was a very careful eater. So talking about all of this stuff, my uncle would modify some of his cooking habits and so on.

So the month goes by and my uncle's already left because he's got his own patients and practice in the states that he has to get back to. So having him here with us for that week really did us a lot of good. So here dad and I drove down to Toronto Western [Hospital] early that morning in April, got the angiogram done, it was a whole day event. And then I was just sitting there while he was the patient being worked on, right? But again, Shez by now you realize that your dad is a heart patient and the anxiety... because you don't know what you're going to hear. And we got there at six in the morning, checked him in and did whatever registration, got in the right wing. Seven o'clock they wheeled him down to the lab where the angiogram is going to be done, and I'm sitting downstairs still. Three o'clock, four o'clock, some of the other family members that there with their significant others for the same or similar tests and so on... they'd already left. And I'm still sitting there and I'm thinking, you know what? This is... it's almost five o'clock now, what's going on? So I went to the window there and I said to her, "Is my dad still in there? Because we've been waiting for so long." She says, "Your dad is wonderful, he's fine, but you know I forgot to come out and get you."

And I'm sitting here, the other people that we all checked in with this morning have already left and you're telling me you forgot to come get me? But I had to keep cool, I wanted my dad. So I go inside, and we exchange hugs and whatnot and he said, "You know what?" He says, "I'm okay, because I watched everything. I could see the whole thing on screen, it's not bad." He says. I'm thinking, okay you

watched it, realizing we don't have medical knowledge. That result is talking to my uncle so we can find out what to do next, not to say that our cardiologist here was not looking after my dad. We had... we have a fabulous cardiologist because he has now become the family cardiologist, he takes care of my mother, he takes care of myself, and my sisters. So our cardiologist was great right from the get go. And my dad's telling me, "Well I watched everything on screen while they were doing all this." He says, "I just have a lot of discomfort," the needle inserted in the groin and worked up to the artery, take the antogram to show the extent of the damage in the artery, "But..." he says, "Other than that, I'm okay." He insisted on walking down to the elevator, to the parking lot and into the car, rather than being wheeled down the stairs into the lobby where I could bring the car up and drive.

But you know that drive home from the hospital at that time of the day, now it's almost six o'clock, we've got evening traffic, right? The Don Valley Parkway is definitely our Don Valley Parking Lot, right? You could feel his pain and his tiredness, right? But he still sat upright like a proper passenger because he hated being the passenger, he was always the driver. The driven man that he is, despite of me having driven for all these years by now, he would still say, "Make sure you watch that guy, he's going to cut in at any second now." You know you're on the DVP, how far are you going to get? But there are still people who are impatient. We made it home, by this time mom had already gone to khane because she knew she had to go to khane. And he had said to her, he says, "You know as much as I haven't come to khane since the heart attack, you're not going to miss a day, you're going to continue going and that's how it's going to be." So again, she wouldn't drive Kamadiasaheb and Kamadianima would come and pick her up. So you know these things that they did to accommodate mum and to look after us. It may have seemed small to the person across from us, but they were actually spending so much time looking after my mother..."

Shezan: "It probably kept her sane."

Munira: "Yeah! And you know, picking her up, driving her to khane and whatever other events that were happening and other community events that they had to attend while dad was at home. We got home that night, they came inside... they didn't stay long. But by that time my dad's okay, just a little discomfort because of the insert of the needle from the groin to the arteries and so on, you know in a few days we'll get the results and we'll go on from there. A few days go by, yeah we find out... now I'm starting to find out like my uncle said it's something serious, it's not a matter to be taken lightly. It was my father's main artery that was damaged. It was damaged because it was blocked and that's what triggered the heart attack, but his supporting arteries were fine.

So when you look at the result of the angiogram, the main artery was almost all dark. The supporting arteries were still very thin and narrow, and that's when I realized, oh my god, you know what? Now I know what my uncle was saying and prepping us, but because it was just one artery that was blocked they didn't want to go in and do anything and also in those days a lot of this research we have now and a lot of the stents and the little things that they do were not happening in those days because we're still talking about 1997, right? The angioplasty and the ballooning and whatnot, these are things that we started to learn after. So now my dad's under treatment, of course with the constant care of the cardiologist, he's taken the rehab program at Sunnybrook [Hospital], he's up there every afternoon he's

doing his routine workout and whatnot, back in khane. On the business side he was there in the background but not so much directly just yet, but it wasn't about the time when he was enrolled..."

[Interruption]

Munira: "It wasn't around the time until he started the rehab program at Sunnybrook that he went to the office to tell everybody that he's recovering from a heart attack. In the meantime all these weeks I've had my mouth shut, right? And they're all asking me "What's happening with dad?" And I'm like, "Well, he's busy with the community, just doing his own thing and I'm taking files home and I'm taking messages home, we're working together." No sweat, right? Because they all know I've been mentored by my dad for eleven years, I know what I'm doing. And I'm taking files home to him for heaven's sake, you know? So it's not like as though privacy and confidentiality is going loose over there. And then I got promoted to a level where I had to leave the branch to work at head office for a certain project that we were doing at Sunlife. So now dad's on his own, back at the office in his own capacity, things are going beautifully, nothing was in any way interrupted or disturbed, clients are fine, clients are very understanding, but you always have glitches, right? Things happen, life happens.

So here's dad going through all his stuff as they said they weren't going to open him up in any way whatsoever, he's going to be treated by physical treatment and modification of lifestyle. Well, you know what? Modification of lifestyle doesn't really happen in terms of cutting back socially, or modifying business hours, he was just gung-ho, he was just go, go, go. And then... yeah, it was March of 1998 and that's when Fifi got sent on her work contract in Switzerland – I jumped a little ahead prior – and dad was saying to her, he says, "Once you settle down, we're going to come visit you, but it all depends on khane schedule." But he says, "We will come and see you."

And you know Shez, I don't know if the girls realized it as much.... when that evening before mom and dad left for khane and they were saying their goodbyes to Fifi because we were going to drive her to the airport for her to take off to Switzerland, but all of us cried like babies. There were just so many tears and we were holding back from showing it to each other and dad's holding Fifi's hand and he's hugging her and she's crying like a little baby and he's crying saying, "We'll come and see you." My mom's ducking in the laundry room, I'm ducking in the parlour room, Nazeera is pretending to be working with the girls because Ara and Allahnah were just teeny and dad's holding Fifi's hand and he's holding her by the cheek and Karim and Salim are sort of turning away not knowing what to do. But we didn't know – and I'm saying that now – because we didn't know that Fifi was not going to be able to fulfill her contract in Switzerland because on May 13th just a couple of months later my father passed away.

And our entire life, our world just shut on us, right? This man that was so full of energy, your strength, your lifeline... is gone. He worked his ass off to bring us to the levels that we're at and to leave us at the levels that we're at compared to what we had to start off with after we were literally thrown out of Uganda. I say we had to flee for our lives, but you know we were thrown out. He wasn't given a chance because of his passion for life and his passion for people. He was a people person all the way, and the drive that he had... he came home... okay I'm going to backtrack a little. That morning of May 13th in 1998 I was at our office here, at the branch while I was still doing my project at head office in downtown Toronto. I had the flexibility of being back and forth at the branch but I had to leave my client base

behind because of my project at head office, it didn't allow me to do both. So dad was, now this time he was looking after my clients but in that short time prior, that thirteen months I was able to help him while he was trying to recover from his heart attack and get back into a routine.

So that morning I was at the branch and he was just so full of energy, and even the staff who he used to tease the staff and they all adored him, right? He'd walk in and everybody would say, "jambo" and things like that, because it was home away from home. And his personality, and the way that the staff was always attached to him and everything, we went back years with the relationship. So he was doing his routine stuff, clients were coming in and going out, I left the office at about one-ish or something like that, he was in the staff area at that time, he wasn't in the office. I said, "Dad, I'm heading out." He says, "Alright, call me, we'll talk around three o'clock or so just to make sure that everything's okay for the weekends schedule." Because it was a long weekend coming up, May long weekend, right? I said, "Alright, I don't know how long it's going to take me to get downtown" because of traffic, and you're going through DVP parking, yeah.

So I left the office, downtown, I made my phone calls, called dad at three or so, he says, "You know what, I've already packed my laptop and I'm ready to go, why don't you call me tonight and then we'll talk?" I thought, okay. He says, "In the meantime the schedule's okay for the weekend." I've said, "Yeah, everybody I've called already is fine, no need to modify." He says, "Even better I don't even need to open my day timer to make modifications." It's fine. And when he said to me he was leaving I teased him because it was just around three, are you sure you're going to leave this early? He's a workaholic, he found balance again between not modifying his lifestyle of work and then community service and all of that. Normally he wouldn't leave until about four or so and then he would do a speed walk because he would walk six kilometers every day. If he didn't do an outdoor walk he would go to Markham mall and he would do a speedwalk there. Like I say his legs were quicker than his mind, having said that control himself and stuff, it doesn't happen.

He says, "Yeah, you know what? Today I'm going to go home, I'm going to use the treadmill and then I'll get ready and do the kind of thing, we'll talk at night." So I was like, "Yeah, yeah." You know, but he actually said what he was going to do, and he did it. I got to my home at about five-ish or a little after and our phone was ringing and I'm thinking crap, I just finished with the DVP, I'm so tired, and it was a pretty warm afternoon and Salim was like, "Okay, you know what, let's just answer the phone." Because it was just ringing and ringing, it didn't stop at any point, yeah. So Salim answered the phone and it was our neighbour Mr. Clark and he says, "Not to alarm you, but your mother in law has just taken your father in law by ambulance to the hospital. She's asked me to call you and to call your sister." And he's telling all this to Salim, right? To say meet us at the hospital, nothing to be alarmed about. And Salim is like, "That was Mr. Clark, mom's taken dad on the ambulance to the hospital, and he says nothing to be alarmed about, but we could just meet them there."

And I thought, oh, okay. Because when I left my dad at around one-ish, he was with the staff visiting them and they were teasing him in return and it was all smiles, and I spoke to him about three-ish, so like, what could go wrong? We got to the hospital six-ish, because from my place to get to Markham Stouffville, it's a good forty minute drive, because at that time we didn't have the higher speed so on Highway 7 or even 16th Avenue. And when my grandmother was in the hospital in the '90s, rather in

1990, I very seldom used Highway 7, I went up to 16th Avenue because it was less busy, and it was quicker in spite of the traffic law and you could speed a little and still not get caught. But there was a time when I got caught but the officer was really nice and said yeah I have grandma in the hospital and I said to him, I said, "Officer, I'm so sorry, I didn't realize, I'm just finishing a visit with my grandmother in the hospital and I am so sorry that I..." he says, "That's okay." He went and did whatever punching he had to do to verify there was a patient by our family name there, so I got away with it.

So here we are now, this is 1998, right? The area had developed a little bit, not by much still, but a little bit. So event to go on 16th Avenue from where we are at Bayview and seven to get to Markham Stouffville is a good drive, and this is almost now five thirty, quarter to six in the evening so by the time we made it to the hospital it was around... after six for sure. And moms like okay, we'll wait for Nazeera to get here and we'll go and see dad together. And I'm asking her, well what happened? That's okay, we'll talk about it when we go inside and I'm thinking, alright. In the meantime she couldn't find Nazeera, and Mr. Clark couldn't find Nazeera either because the girls had afternoon activities, one was at dance or piano or something... you know between Ara and Allahnah, my girlies.

So we couldn't find Nazeera, in the meantime we found Karim, mom found Karim, I shouldn't say. I don't know what she did or didn't tell him. But Mr. Clark said to us, nothing serious but mom's just taken dad by ambulance to the hospital and you'll meet them there. So she's sitting there in emerg in the waiting area, still as hell, not saying a word other than let's wait for Nazeera and then we'll go inside and we'll talk, in the meantime I'm thinking let's call Nazeera and find out where she is and what's going on, I mean we didn't have cellphones in those days. And you know me and technology even today, so back in those days. So I'm at the payphone dialing her home number, no answer. And I'm thinking, okay, why I have to wait to go see my dad. So I go back and sit with mom and Salim and in the meantime Salim's sitting on the other side of mom, sitting between... no, sitting on the other side of where mom and I were sitting when he was on my left side, so he had now moved over. So I didn't think much of it, maybe he went to get a glass of water or whatever. So I said, "Mom, how long do we wait? Because I can't get ahold of Nazeera, right? So why don't I go in and we'll just keep an eye out, we'll bring her in when she gets there. And she says, "No, no, let's wait a few minutes." And I'm thinking, oh, this is nuts, right? So I got up and said, I'm going to go find out what's going on," I want to know what's happening with my dad, right?"

Shezan: "Yeah, of course."

Munira: "And just as I was going through this door, which is not the same door we used when my dad was first taken to hospital thirteen months prior, that morning with chest pain. I'm now using another door because mom pointed that way, "We'll go in when Nazeera gets here and we'll talk together." So I'm heading out that way and just as I started to turn the doorknob, I could feel my mom and Salim behind me and I've now opened the door, Shez and I'm just getting into that hallway there and my mom's saying to Salim, "He's gone." And I turned back, and I think I may have even slammed the door in my mom's face. I said, "How dare you." You know that immediate anger, that's my father you're talking about and by now she's got her hand up on her mouth and she's trying to fight back her emotions, and she's looking at Salim and he was just lost. Here I am angry, I've just yelled at my mom, "How dare you?"

That's my father you're talking about. I don't know how damn loud I was but somebody from the staff came by, someone from down the hall from all those rooms came by as well.

And I just kept walking, I didn't know where I was going, but I just kept walking because I wanted to see my dad, more now than a few seconds ago, right? And sure enough, he was down the hall in a room on my left hand side, that's all I remember. I went in there and Shez, he's just laying there so still and I'm looking at him and I'm holding his hand saying, "Wake up." And of course there's no movement, right? And his fingers are slightly curled and I tried to uncurl his fingers, and I could smell the rubber of the treadmill handles because he did what he said he was going to do, I could smell the rubber on his fingers because he had walked on the treadmill. And I kept touching his fingers and rubbing my hands to warm them up and they were just sort of folding, they wouldn't stay out straight. And I think at one point I was even trying to open his eyes, you know and I'm rubbing his mouth, and my mom is just sitting at the foot of my dad without any expression and I don't even know where Salim was at this point and I looked at my mom and she just sat there and a few minutes later Kamadiasaheb and Kamadianima come in because I guess my mom had already called them, but I guess she had to because she's obviously not going to khane, right?

So Nazeera is still not there. Kamadiasaheb ... and I guess when I was on the phone trying to get a hold of Nazeera while we were still in the waiting room before I made this rage to want to go see my dad, mom must have said something to Salim at that time about calling Kamadiasaheb or something like that because I know she didn't say anything to me about my dad just yet. She said to Salim, keep an eye out Kamadiasaheb and Kamadianima are coming before they go to khane. So I don't know where Salim was as I say, he was either still in the room or he was around the hallway making sure that when they come they know exactly where to come and so on and so forth. So they got here and Kamadianima was just beside herself, she just lost complete control, right? Because they were so close."

Shezan: "They spent so much time together."

Munira: "Yes! And Kamadiasaheb was trying to be very strong, just very composed. I said, "We're still waiting for Nazeera, right. So they came inside, I went and decided I was going to stay outside for a little while, see if I can see Nazeera anywhere along the way there. In the meantime of course they needed to leave because they needed to make it to khane on time. When you're at Markham Stouffville and khane is down on Eglinton and Berrmonsey, right? That's a long drive, you're not going to take the DVP but even taking the local roads it's going to take you forever. It was already quarter to seven, Shez, du'a starts at seven thirty. Wow I don't know what they did but they made it to khane on time. In the meantime Nazeera got there and I said, alright let's go inside and then again the whole rush of emotions and then all of that. And then I'm thinking, well we have to let Fifi know what's going on, right? She's halfway across the world. Mom says call uncle first, because my uncle didn't know.

So here I am from this room telling my uncle that it's all over, but how do I call Fifi? And I guess with him also being in a state of shock, he says, "Just make up a story, do whatever you have to do." In the meantime I guess my mom had already called my cousin to bring my aunt here, the younger aunt which is closer in the city rather than my dad's older sister who's out is Mississauga and you can't... well the older sister with her health issues and then the one that had the closest relationship to my dad, you

can't just tell her something like this on the phone. And I don't think my aunt heard directly from my mom but when my mom spoke to my cousin to say you know what go bring mom and come to the hospital, I'm not sure how much she said to my cousin but he had to go pull out my aunt from khane at that time, they got to the hospital just as I was talking to my uncle, by this time it's seven thirty or somewhere around there and my aunt's walking in and the emotions again. And then with her emotions she's now saying, "Oh he's now with ma" and stuff like that, and I'm thinking okay, fine. But you know what? We have to let Fifi know, how do we call her? What do I say to her? I can't even ask my mom what to say because my uncle just said to me, "Make up a story and get her home."

Well you're still in the hospital and you don't know what's happening, there's still a long weekend coming up, right? So we stayed in the hospital for a little while, it was now after eight or something like that, just a little while later, we got home and Kamadiasaheb came over, khane was over by then. And I said to my sister, "We have to let Fifi know." Shez, there were so many people at home already. You talk about being a tight knit community and a lot of passion from people and the feelings were just... oh my god, beyond description. When push comes to shove people will be there for you regardless of good or otherwise, right? The house is filling up with people and I'm thinking how do I call Fifi? What do I say to her? Crap, you know.

So this is about almost ten thirty or something like this by now and, the time change, right? Ten thirty here or something like that and I'm not thinking right and I can't calculate what the time is now in Switzerland where she is, and then I had to look for a phone number because it was always dad and her calling each other, right? How often did I get into this? She hadn't been gone that long, she left in March and this is May. Karim came home and I said, "Papa, we need to -," again the names, because he became papa. I said, "Papa we need to let Fifi know what's going on, what do we do?" And I couldn't rely on Salim because I couldn't find the strength, and he's not strong that way. He's strong in many ways but he's not strong in that way because he was falling apart, he's very close to my dad being the first son in law and all the good years that he'd had with my dad and everything and my dad, you know what as a mature age person, a mature minded individual, with us, he was on our level, and with kids, kids love him. He was just so well rounded, well driven, the whole nine yards, he was just the perfect person. And that's my dad, just a perfect person.

I said, "Papa I don't know Fifi's number, I think Nazeera has it," and she'd gone home because you couldn't leave Ara and Allahnah, right? And he says alright let me call her and get Fifi's number and we'll call. In the meantime I said to Kamadiasaheb, I said, "What do I do? How do I tell Fifi what's going on?" I can't just point blank say to her, "You need to get home right away." You know, how is this going to work? And he's thinking and this and that and in the meantime it was Fifi's birthday on May 5th, and I hadn't had a chance to call her for her birthday, right? And this is now the night of May 13th, it was also the week of paroria sataro. Okay so these things have a way of falling into place and my dad, my god, talk about timing as well. Shez, papa comes back and he says, "Well, alright Bibi," and papa calls me [inaudible]. The girls call me Bia and then it turns into other names. He says, "Bia, I have the number." And I'm thinking alright, I can't use the kitchen phone because..."

Shezan: "Too much people around."

Munira: "...There's just so much noise, right? What dad had done, he decided over the past year he was going to get Fifi her own personal phone – talk about being spoiled – it was a luxury to have your own phone, right? So that line was specifically plugged in her bedroom and nowhere else. Then you have all these phones all over the house with the main number, right? I was up in the bedroom when we got home, so mom could go upstairs and freshen up and so on so she could come back downstairs because the house is filling up with all these people that have now found out that my dad has passed away." By the time Kamadasaheb and Kamadianima had gone to khane, people could sense that something was not right. And of course after khane with all the emotions and everything, they knew that it was all over. So I'd been up in the bedroom and the bed had been moved because I guess they... when the ambulance came to pick up my dad, they probably tried to resuscitate him, okay, and at this point we didn't know because my mom had not been able to tell us why she had to call the ambulance to go to the hospital. Normally we would just drive. We carried my dad the morning he had a heart attack. Again, none of this is really hitting, right?

So I said to Karim, "You and Kamadasaheb come with me. We went into Fifi's room, I used her phone, I didn't even use the family phone because we had call waiting on the family phone. When there's a call coming in then the beeps, you're cut off, you're not getting a clear line to speak properly. I don't know if Fifi's phone had call waiting... anyways, that's not important but she had her personal line. So we decided, or rather I decided that we were going into her room to use her phone so I could call her from there and just shut the door in Fifi's room and shut the door in the master bedroom because of the way it's located. So here we are I've got Karim here, Kamadasaheb here, and I'm sitting on Fifi's bed and I'm using her phone, and I'm going to use our usual language and there's some swear words in there, is it going to affect the tape?"

Shezan: "No, no. That's totally fine."

Munira: "So luckily she was home and I'm not sure what time it was still, I still haven't calculated that almost seventeen years later, alright. So she picks up and says, "Hello?" with her usual... anyways, each of us have our styles, right? And we all answer the phone in our own way. And I said, "Hey bitch." And she said, "Oh!" "Well, happy belated birthday!" and she goes, "Yeah I was wondering why you didn't call me. I got your card." I said, "Yeah, anyways it's been busy. So what in the hell did you do?" "Oh," she says, "Just a handful of friends here from the office." She goes, "So, why are you calling me now?" I said, "Well you know Dr. Mykovitz said we need to take deddy for other treatments and stuff." And I said, "We got a call saying that deddy would be a perfect candidate for this experimental surgery for his kind of heart attack and he's going in Friday morning." deddy's already gone to bed but he spoke to me earlier before they went to khane." And I'm thinking what the fuck is coming out of your mouth? "And he wanted me to call you to say if you could fly home, even by Friday because he's scheduled to go in the morning, at least when he comes out of recovery we can all be there to receive him."

Shez, I have no idea where all this shit is coming out of my mouth from, right? And I'm not even turning my posture to look at Karim or Kamadasaheb at this point I'm on a roll, just babbling, maybe this time being a babbler is good. I don't know. And she's like "Uh, well, does it have to be Friday?" and I said, "Do you know what? First things first, speak to the office," because they know. You see, Nazeera and Fifi, when Nazeera was here this company that they work for Gucci Timepieces. Everybody had become

friends with us they used to come home for dinner, all the colleagues at the office and so on, and when Nazeera left after she got married, Fifi kind of got into the company. They still all knew all of us, right? Only now it's another sister, not the same sister, right?

So I said, "Just let the Gucci office there know that dad's a candidate for this experimental surgery and he's asked that you be home at least by the time he's out of surgery so we could all be there to see him come out of the surgery, right? She says, "Okay let me see what I can do." She goes, "Why don't I just call you back in a few minutes?" I said, no, not here, but let me call you in the morning. Because I don't want to disturb Deddy he has to get up before khane and it's already almost eleven o'clock here and I still should not be here, but he's gone to bed. "Well, why can't I speak to him?" I said, "Just, bug off, he's gone to bed, he has to get up early and then he has to go to the office and then you know how he is because then he's not going to take it easy and the same old routine and crap, if you could make it, that's be great, let me call you back in the morning.

And I'm thinking, fuck I've hung up now lying through my teeth to my sister and we don't even have a father. Shez, he's gone. In the meantime, one of Fifi's friends with her parents came home that evening and I said to her. I said, "Here's Fifi's phonebook with all your friends. Whatever you and the rest of your friends do, don't say to her our dad is not here, she won't make it home, because I've called her and I don't remember what I've said to her and Shez I was a blank slate, I had no idea what I'd just said to her because I'd lied through my teeth. So you know when you lie you can't remember what your lies were? But somehow it came out the way it did. I gave her friend the phone book, I sent her off to Fifi's bedroom, you call every god damn friend in this book and don't tell them to say anything to Fifi from here on until she gets home. I don't know when she's coming home, but I'm going to speak to her in the morning.

I called her in the morning and I said, "Well? What's happening?" she goes, "Why are you sounding so polite?" because I didn't say any of our swear words addressing each other, right? Because that night when I called her bitch she called me a slut, these are our little love names for each other, it's just how we are. We're very unnormal that way. I said, "You know, I'm at the office." Now, call display didn't exist to the extent it does in these days, they may have been in some areas but to the best of my knowledge it wasn't between our phone lines. I said, "I'm at the office, the door is open so I have to be very professional. I said, "So what are the arrangements?" she said, "Well, we're trying to figure out what to do."

In the meantime Nazeera had called the Gucci office here Thursday morning to say when Fifi comes to you to ask to leave to come back to Toronto, don't say anything, but this is what's happened last night. Dad's passed away and we need her home." So she says, "Yeah, you know the funny part is they asked if I need to use the private jet to get home." Because Nazeera had communicated with the office here and they communicated with the office there the offer to put her on a private jet. She said, "I refused that because they didn't even hear why I want to come home, they just said, "Yeah if you want to go home that's okay before I could think of proper permission" she said, "They even booked my tickets for me."

So she flew out of there Thursday night, arrived Toronto Friday afternoon around three-ish. By this time Shez, it's now almost two days and the whole of the world knows my dad is not here, right? We have

been getting calls from Africa, from Singapore, you name it anywhere and everywhere. Salim and I get to the airport, there's a few Ismaili passengers around there and I'm thinking, shit! Fifi comes out with a couple pieces of luggage and she's not knowing what to do, and on the drive to the airport from home I'm thinking how in the hell am I going to do this? It was through the drive on the 401 I said now I realize what I've said to her, it arrived through my fuckin brains and I actually said to her that dad's in experimental surgery this morning and we're to be at the hospital to see him come out of recovery, and what have I done? And like I said to you, Salim is not strong. Strong in a lot of areas but this is not his area of strength. He says, "Well, play it with time." And I'm thinking yeah, right, fatload of good you are as always, right.

And we're driving and there's this and that and we get to the terminal and not wanting to pay for parking you know the old mentality, I won't pay for parking. I said, "Just wait out here and you won't have to drive around the back, that's okay. I just want to very quickly check on the screen if the flight had arrived, because we were running late with the traffic on the 401, or what the status was. Well with our luck the flight was delayed by an hour and I'm thinking alright, fine. So went out the door, he was still there, I said go park the car, the flight's delayed. He says, "Do you want to drive around? I said, "Nope, just go park the car." Because I'm still trying to figure out how I'm going to receive her, right? And I'm seeing a couple of our people already at the terminal and I'm thinking okay I might say something to somebody here that's just waving at me from a distance and I'm all teary eyes and I don't know what, what are we saying to her when she comes out of the gate?

So we decided we're going to keep walking outside for a little while and then we'll go on and so on so sure enough she lands, takes a little while for her to come out with her luggage and she comes out and goes... and I'm thinking fuck. What am I to do now? So she goes, "Okay, what's the update?" And I said, "Well I don't know because we haven't called the hospital since about one o'clock or so. So let's head out to the hospital and then we'll find out what's going on." In the meantime Salim caused a little distraction which was handy for the very first time. He says, why don't you girls walk up and down here on the ramp while I go inside and get the car and I'll meet you out here. And Fifi goes, "No, no, no it's okay let's just wheel it all get in the car together." And then something happened along the way and she says, "No, okay get the car and we'll meet you here."

So that's fine. And there's a good and a bad, a good and a bad, how much conversation can I have here? What small talk do I make and whatnot and so on and so forth. So here we're talking about flight, turbulence, riff raff, whatever, timing this that and the other. She was saying things and I was saying things and I don't exactly remember what kind of small talk and bullshit we were doing with each other. Salim came, we threw the luggage in the car, she sat in the back, I sat in the front and everything as normal for the first little while. But you know Shez, we didn't even finish the first ramp out of the terminal and I thought fuck! She says, "Okay, now Tal where are we going?" we don't say Sal, we don't say Salim, we say Tal because the girls couldn't pronounce S's when they were babies. Sal became Tal so Fifi is like, "Tal, where are we going?" and he says, "Well okay, Bia, what do you want to do?" and I said, "Fifi, we don't have a father." And Salim stopped the car.

Fifi... she took a fit. She took a fit. I thought she was just going to fly out of the windshield. She was sitting in the back on the passenger side not the driver and I couldn't hold it anymore. And Salim

stopped the car, I got out of my seat, I got in the back seat, pushed her in and he just started to drive. I grabbed her and I held her for the longest time and I thought she was going to fly out the windshield, she was just taking it... she says how come you didn't tell me? I couldn't tell her, Shez. She wouldn't have made it home. And in the meantime mum had said, we're not going to make any funeral arrangements until I know when my baby will be home. So here's now Friday evening, this is a long weekend, you're obviously not going to be able to do anything Saturday morning. My dad's funeral... he passed away on a Wednesday night, his funeral was the following Tuesday on the 19th. My mom had five days of all this.

We got home and she was just so composed and by this time Fifi and I had just fallen apart and luckily enough some of the people that were home through the early afternoon knew that Fifi was coming and wanted to give us space and privacy and like I said, Shez, people are there to support you in every way. I guess there must have been a handful of people who in the later part of the afternoon by the time you got home Kamadiasaheb must have talked to a few of them to say, you know the family needs some privacy because the youngest daughter is coming home this afternoon and she doesn't know. When we got home it was beautiful in the sense that there were no strange cars in the driveway, papa's car was there because obviously its family... and I think Salim and I left one of our cars there because we both drove in separately that morning and then we left for the airport to get Fifi, so just a couple of vehicles family cars and I think Kamadiasaheb was till home or something like that. And just as we're turning into our street as we're coming up on up on Highway 7 to the little road that takes us home Fifi says, "Do I look okay? I don't want mother to see me like this." And I said, "Okay let's straighten up."

Meanwhile Shez, neither one of us knew what was happening because we had now lost control and we had no control of our feelings or anything. She's straightening up and there's Kleenex all over the place. So we go in and moms standing at the tip of the staircase on top and she says, "Hi Miti!" because that's her name for Fifi is Miti, right? And mom is so upright, composed. We tried to remain as composed as we could, all of us ran upstairs into the bedroom, Karim was there, Salim was there, Nazeera, even the girls were with us and mom sat on the bed where she always sits and we do our family nonsense, only this time it wasn't family nonsense. And that's when I heard all of this, she sat where she usually sits, dad's pillow was still the way it was.

Between Wednesday night and now Friday afternoon none of us have touched anything on the bed, mom and I slept in Fifi room for those two nights we didn't even sleep in their room. And the girls are there and Nazeera is trying to keep them occupied with their little stuffy toys and games and whatnot and papa sit on the floor here by the window and Salim went to sit there and I sat at the foot of my dad's side of the bed. Fifi was right there with mom and she says, "So Miti," and she was fighting, fighting, tears and emotions, and she says, "Now I'm going to tell all my kids what happened. Because when all this happened in the afternoon, I still don't know, right? But now there was this natural energy of living through the shock of what's just happened in our lives.

She says, "Well Wednesday afternoon when I came home from shopping, it was around four-ish or something and dad was downstairs on the treadmill, I opened the door and said who's there as a joke, in Gujarati so if somebody's out there breaking into your home, they're not going to answer you in Gujarati and say, "I'm breaking into your house." He said, "Yeah, it's me on the treadmill! He finished his routine

six kilometers or six miles whatever on the treadmill, came upstairs, had a bite to eat or something said to her I'm going to take a nap, but their routine of having to make it to khane five o'clock we would come downstairs and have a quick supper, jump into the shower and by six ten they would be out of the house driving to khane, right?

Mom said, "We did all this around four-ish then he said to me I'm going to take a nap, four fifty-nine I couldn't hear any footsteps. Thought, ah, okay he's napping. Then five o'clock" – this is now second to second, minute to minute she's describing all this right, - then she goes, "It's five and I'm thinking, how come Deddy isn't washing his hands and freshening up to come downstairs for supper?" Because he was by the clock, because she was upstairs and he was laying on the bed looking at the door and his right arm was all stretched out from what she was telling us. Now, I don't know what that meant, but she says, "When I grabbed his arm it was limp and dropped. Then I grabbed his arm again and began to say don't you want to have supper? We're going to be late because you're always was yelling at me..." kind of thing, right? Women, you know, we get distracted all the time and he was just like... almost like a military person, very disciplined. Timing was his utmost and he just made sure that he worked like clockwork, a lot of these priorities were a part of his schedule.

She says, "I called 911 and they put me on hold." She says, "I hung up and I called them again, don't put me on hold there's something happening to my husband. Along the way after I called 911 something occurred to me I should give Mr. Clark Bia's number and Nana's number" and she goes, "I didn't know what was happening and within a few minutes the ambulance was here and they pulled Deddy from the bed and put him on the floor and they moved the bed and they were trying to do something and I'm still talking to Mr. Clark," and of course Mr. Clark is home right, not just at his home but now he's in our home. And the paramedics are doing whatever they're doing and put Deddy on the stretcher and down the staircase. She goes, "I left the house just as the stretcher was leaving the house we don't know what happening..." Mr. Clark doesn't have a house key, right? So never mind, that's not important, this is how it all happened. When she came up to get dad because at five he was not in the washroom getting washed to come downstairs for supper and he was very limp.

Within a few minutes of making it to the hospital, Shez, they came out and said to mom, "I'm sorry, we couldn't help him." So she called Mr. Clark to say it's all over, and he said, "I've gotten a hold of Munira but I'm having trouble reaching Nazeera but I'm sure she's on her way." And sure enough, we were on our way, Mr. Clark just let the phone ring, ring, ring, right? And this is how I found out what happened that afternoon before mom and dad got to the hospital. She says, "He was just laying there straight but everything was so normal, when he came up the staircase from the basement he was fine, he munched on something, had something to drink, teased me, said don't wake me up for now, I just want to nap" the usual crap, "If here's any phone call I'll call them on my way to khane from the car..." whatever, whatever... the usual crap, right?

And she says, "This is what they said to me in the hospital, then they put her in a little private waiting room which was so confined Shez it was maybe three times the size of this table, no windows, nothing, claustrophobia. My mother's claustrophobic, even at home in her bedroom there are no window coverings, the doors are always open as well. We've got blinds, drapery, nothing in her bedroom or

ensuite ever gets shut, everything is always wide open, even the bedroom door. Claustrophobia is catching on, in the meantime she called Kamadisaheb from the hospital while she was waiting along with calling Mr. Clark and let him know what was going on. She had called my cousin to say, you know what? Let your mom know that I'm at the hospital, it's not looking good. She said I couldn't call... I'm not going to use my aunt's name, my older aunt in Mississauga, because of her health and her attachment to Deddy she would have never been able to accept the news, not that I told your cousin what happened, but I just said, "If you could bring your mom to the hospital it'd be great because it's not looking good or something along that line." But with Kamadisaheb she had to point blank say to him and that's why they came to the hospital before going to khane. And that's my father's life.

So from somebody from the age of thirteen, self-made individual at the age of fifty-nine did everything with all his heart with part time education, here there or where he could find it. He made his younger brother a professional, right? He supported my grandmother and his sisters, he brought us into the world, gave us everything we have, this is what we have. And the great person that my father is, was, but still is."

Shezan: "Still is, yeah."

Munira: "So for a refugee – and I'm sure the families have many, may heartwarming experiences they could share with you, but this is what we've had."

Shezan: "And he went in peace."

Munira: "He's so peaceful."

Shezan: "Of course."

Munira: "And when I went a few weeks later to see Doctor Mykovitz I said what happened? Because dad had gone through this first annual which is the same March of '98, when Fifi left for Switzerland, dad has his first annual with the cardiologist, he came out of the examining room and him and Doctor Mykovitz were in chuckles, you know. And he's, "I'm fine! I've been told just go live a normal life, everything's great!" You know his physical routine was his discipline so that was his quote, unquote, lifestyle change, right? Not that he made any changes in his business hours or community service hours, his social life, because his passion was for people. So he still did whatever he had to do there. Dr. Mykovitz said to me he says, "You know sweetie, your dad did not pass away because of his heart attack, he passed away because of his stress levels since his heart attack where he just continued being the person that he always wanted to be, which was to be with people, his joy in life, his business, his pride in his community, as much as he thought he was looking after himself, he really was not." His body wasn't getting the rest that he needed, so it was stress that took him away thirteen months after his heart attack, but it wasn't his heart attack as a whole, so that's what happened, Shez. And that's my dad."

Shezan: "Thank you so much for sharing."

Munira: "Oh, thank you for spending all this time just to hear me say all this. Thank you."

Shezan: "I guess my last few questions are around... I just find growing up in Canada, you grew up here for the most part..."

Munira: "Yes."

Shezan: "...But your dad probably spent how many years? Thirty, twenty five?"

Munira: "For my dad it was almost... almost thirty five years. Pardon me, no... I was just turning thirty seven the year he passed away."

Shezan: "I know the 20th anniversary was '92."

Munira: "Yeah the silver jubilee was '92, we came here in '73, he passed away in '98 so for him it was almost twenty-six years, or even twenty-seven, somewhere around there."

Shezan: "So then how did you guys feel about, I guess your identities..."

Munira: "Identities?"

Shezan: "Your mix of South-Asian, Canadian..."

Munira: "Everything. Do you know what? Prejudice will always be there. It was there, it is there. But it's how you behave, right? Now when we first came here we were always very culturally diversified. And when I say that, do you know in Uganda we didn't walk around deliberately wearing traditional clothing or anything of that sort and socially we always had what I call European dressing, right? Saris that my mom wore were always very complimentary. People always go, "Oh wow, beautiful! You could actually wear a sari and move around, you know? She never dressed like a typical Ismaili. Prejudice is only where when you were around ignorant people in the local areas, but as a whole when we first came here and school started and I was socializing and all that and as we were making friends and so on, it wasn't an issue because we could communicate, it's not that language is a barrier, right? It's not as though presenting ourselves or our presentation was a variant at all, we didn't have issues at school in terms of prejudice.

Yes, pronouncing certain names was an issue. But you know my sister and I were very lucky and we never ended up with nicknames in school. My dad through the business, because of the diverse cultures that insurance companies have, for all comforts and purposes they've all... most of our mature colleagues have shortened their names. So instead of being Mehboob Dhanani was known as Bob Dhanani, right? But in terms of the community it's always Mehboob Dhanani. But let me just track back, in terms of the company and all the recognition and all his achievements and so on, all his certificates, all his plaques, everything, and always identity was Mehboob K. Dhanani, and K coming from my grandfather's name which is Kassamali Dhanani. So my dad was always addressed with his birth identity on all his recognition achievements, so we didn't face things like that. It was very simple for us, yeah."

Shezan: "And you found interactions with Ugandans to be..."

Munira: "Beautiful, yeah. You know like you and I the first time we met in Allahnah's bedroom... what a thing to say, right? Yeah, yeah. But you know as all of us meet for the first time and just mix and mingle and build this relationship and the closeness, yeah... it was very comfortable, yeah."

Shezan: "Well that's awesome. It's nice to hear. Well those are the main questions I was looking at, Canadian identity and things like that and the life story, which was phenomenal. So thank you so much!"

Munira: "Oh my god, no thank you!"

[End of transcript.]