

The Ugandan Asian Archive Oral History Project
An Oral History with the Sarangi Family

Archives and Research Collections
Carleton University Library
2016

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Date: June 23, 2016
Session #: 1/1
Length: 103 minutes
Location: Toronto, Ontario

Abstract:

The Sarangi family was expelled from Uganda in 1972. With two parents and eight children their family was relocated to the United Kingdom and Canada. Some family members had arrived in Canada, one year prior to the expulsion decree but would soon be joined by the majority of the Sarangi family.

This is their story that ends positively where they continue to flourish as resilient people. They have reconciled their past without any regrets for the misfortunes imposed on them. Adversity gave them new opportunities when Canada gave them safe haven. They treasure the generosity this country provided and harbor no ill will towards others. They assimilated into the society, having good jobs, paid their fair share of taxes and never took a cent from the government. Their family is a testament that as immigrants starting out with nothing, they have contributed a lot and their kids & grandkids are following their example. This is their legacy.

Currently, each of the family members have established families of their own which are spread across North America and UK.

Featured within the oral history interview are multiple perspectives and recollections of the family's roots in Uganda and subsequent resettlement in Canada. Their struggles while adjusting to life in Canada demonstrate the complexity of resettlement in Canada.

This interview was conducted in the home of Shirinkanu Sarangi in Toronto.

Shezan Muhammedi: "So this is an oral history being done on June 23rd and I'll let you guys take it away with your family's history"

Altaf Sarangi: "I think you should start with mom's story"

Shamim LaBreche: "Tell him what your name is"

Shirin Khanu Sarangi: "Shirin Khanu Sarangi"

Shamim: "You want her to start with Uganda or coming from India?"

Shezan: "Coming from India yeah"

Shamim: Gujarati - asking her mother Shirin Khanu to explain her family's migration from India.

Shirin: Gujarati - "Every month we had only 25 shillings"

Shamim: "Had to work [her father], not like a guarantee but he had to commit to working there [in Uganda] for five years"

Shirin: "After he going making his own business, in a small town in Busia. Busia is about 45 miles away. We sold clothes, cigarettes, everything"

Shamim: "Like a convenience store, like a general store"

Shirin: "He's working every day for five years and then after that I'm coming. I'm coming after, uh, and I came to Mbale. My husband is working in the shop and I'm working in the home, children, and making food and selling food. You know ghantiya, chevro, and chips"

Shezan: "Oh ghantiya, all the nastoo, all the good stuff"

Shamim: Gujarati

Mehboob Sarangi: "Before we were born they had that"

Shamim: "Let me start the story, so my dad came in 1934 at the age of 15 from a town in Gujarat called Kathiawar. It's a suburb of Porbandar so that's where his family was born. And they were nine of them in that family. And they were kind of lower-middle class, they had a farm, they had a warehouse but the farm was leased to other farmers and my grandfather had a warehouse which he would rent out. So there were a lot of kids to feed right? As they got older and able to work there were opportunities being started out in Uganda. So his cousin Ibrahim bhai went first to Uganda, and then asked two of the brothers, like three of the brothers.

Shirin: Gujarati

Shamim: "When he came in '34 he was working with this guy called Ibrahim, his cousin, and he guaranteed that he would give a job to my dad but my dad would have to work for five years. So he worked in his shop in Busia which was a village that was the gateway to Kenya. Everybody had to pass through Busia to go into Kenya"

Altaf: "It's still a main road now"

Shamim: "It's on the boundary line. So my dad worked in that shop so it was like a general store and he was sleeping on the counter at age fourteen and he would have to get up in the middle of the night because they would take in all the deliveries

Shirin: Gujarati

Shamim: "They would bring in all kinds of maize and products, farm products, at night even from Kenya they would bring some and they would bring peanuts and maize and all other kinds of farm products. It was my father's responsibility to look after that shop. And stay there and you know look after it day and night. Whenever there was a need. So in 1939 he went back to India to Gujarat for a holiday and for a little bit and then he married my mother. Now my dad and my mother's brother were very good friends so that's how they arranged a marriage for my mother and my dad. My mother came from a very very wealthy family. That's my grandmother there, [pointing to a picture] my mother's mother, that's my dad's mother. So my grandparents, my maternal grandparents are quite wealthy."

Shirin: Gujarati

Shamim: "They had two safes, one to keep gold and one to keep silver. They were, my maternal grandmother she was a businesswoman, so she and my grandfather had a lot of apartments; 40 apartments and they would rent that and they would have that rent. And also they were money lenders so they would lend money and for collateral they would get silver or gold as collateral. That's why they needed the safes and when my grandfather would do the accounts and my grandmother was more the business type, you know, do the terms and the lending and all of that. So that's how they made their, even I went actually in 2014, there are the same house where she was living, that whole area is still called by her name Poorbhai's Manor, people still recognize her and her name. This whole area used to belong to her, she had about 40 apartments, so a lot of people still remember her."

Shirin: Gujarati

Shamim: "She had three buildings so three neighbourhoods kind of, little blocks, but I went to where she, my grandmother's house was. Anyway, so my uncle and my dad were good friends. So that's how they arranged a marriage of my mother to my dad so that was in 1940, January

1940 they got married. And the war, the Second World War was just starting at that time, instances, or just noises being made about the Second World War. So my dad went back to East Africa and my mother stayed behind. And my grandmother wouldn't let my mother come over because the ships were being bombarded so there were no ships coming along the Indian Ocean, only the Arab dhows, and they were being bombarded all the time. So my mother stayed at her mother's place and then in 1945 when the war ended then she came over.

Shirin: "After five years"

Shamim: "In 1945 she came over. So initially they had the store, after that, after the five years that my dad worked for his cousin, then he opened up his own. When my mother came over I think, I don't remember exactly when they opened up their own store. I think when my mother came over, so my dad and my mother used to work in their own store in Busia. So then uh next year 1946 my brother Zul was born there and then we had another brother Nizar and then Ash and then Ash was about a year when my brother Nizar passed away. And then my brother Shiraz was born there and my dad had already started a business, a trucking business. Doing, you know, crossing the border and taking things that were grown in Uganda or whatever"

Altaf: "Sugar and coffee, rice and flower"

Shamim: "and bringing it, and going to Kenya and bringing whatever from Kisumu. From Busia the straight road ran into Kisumu in Kenya and he would buy stuff there and bring it back. So people would rent his truck to carry on this trucking business. He was the driver and he would take on; like as a truck driver would, like they would hire him and go. My mother would look after the store and the kids. So when my brother Zul was six years old, my dad's motive in life was to educate his kids, that was his reason for being. That was his reason for being. So when my brother was six, my oldest brother Zul, my dad decided that he was going to move from Busia to Mbale because there were schools in Mbale. There was the Aga Khan primary school and he wanted his kids to get an education. In Busia there was a one room school where all the

kids were taught together in one room with not a real teacher you know. I think my uncle, Mohamadali was teaching that class, you know, and he wasn't a teacher as such but he was the elected teacher. So my dad wanted his kids to get a proper education. So they moved to Mbale and initially my dad was just doing the trucking business. And then I was the first one to be born in Mbale, they were renting an apartment and I think after three years they built their own home and they opened up a business. And my dad was still um, still had his trucking business and my mother would basically look after the shop. And then there were four other brothers born so like in ten years my mother had seven children. Between 1946 and 1956 there were seven kids. And then in 1960 Altaf was born and then '64 my youngest brother Hanif was born. And then um, my dad had an accident with the truck and a black man was killed.”

Mehboob: “A black policeman, it was a policeman”

Shamim: “He was killed and my dad was imprisoned and it was a bad time in our family at that time so my mother had to sell all her jewelry. Had to sell everything that she had and post bail and get my dad out of jail. Once he was released, then they decided he wasn't going to do trucking anymore. The decided to focus just on the store and at the time the store was doing quite well as well” - Gujarati asking Shirin questions

Shirin: Gujarati

Shamim: “They used to call it lorries not trucks but we call them trucks. So the shop was doing alright and so my dad decided no he was going to concentrate on that. We had a smaller store right near the cinema and then we moved to a different location, a bigger store, and then eventually, just before we left my father was even starting to buy” Gujarati asking Shrin questions

Shirin: Gujarati

Shamim: "In the meantime we had also built another home. So we were living in the same apartment that we went to when I was about three years old. Minaz had just been born and I think he was about six months old when we moved. I think we still moved in the first house. That was the one and only house we lived in."

Altaf: "Oh the one that I went to? 227 Masaba Avenue"

Shamim: "The one before that we were renting. It was in a high rise apartment. Yeah it was across the store and further up"

Altaf: "Yeah I saw the sign, I don't remember it, I was born in the house"

Shamim: "Yeah you were born there because Minaz was the last one to be born in the apartment and then when he was about four"

Altaf: "So then I was the next one, I was the first one born in the house that we built"

Shamim: "Yeah you were born there, remember they had all home deliveries. When the youngest Hanif was born, we had a hospital at that time but my mother was so used to being, delivering at home, she had all home deliveries. In the meantime after that my dad had also bought another home, he had another home which we were renting out. By the time I was going to school, by the time I can remember, we were doing quite well, my parents were doing well, and we had a nice lifestyle. My dad was working, my mother was helping out in the store and um my dad's reason was education as I told you. So when my brother Zul finished his A-levels, we still used to be, we went by the British system the O-levels and A-levels like our grade thirteen or the equivalent of grade thirteen. So when he finished that he was sent to England to be educated. So he went to England and after a year he came back. He had a good time in England, ok? He didn't bring in the marks that my dad thought he should have brought in. So he was recalled back for a year [laughter] and then Ash went after he finished his A levels, he went

to England to start university. Um, so Zul came home for about a year and then he got accepted, and he did quite well in that one year and then get got accepted to Strathclyde University in Glasgow. So he went to Scotland.

Ashrafali Sarangi: "So first time, I went to Birmingham"

Shamim: "Yeah first time he went to Birmingham"

Ashrafali: " The first time dad sent me to England I looked at all the prospectus and there was only two courses that were not done in East Africa. One was aeronautical engineering and the other was chemical engineering because there was no industry. So I said to my dad, I want to do chemical engineering"

Altaf: "So that you could go to England?" [laughter]

Ashrafali: "The only place he could send me was to England"

Altaf: "He's not as dumb as he looks you know" [laughter]

Shamim: Gujarati, "So he went and then my brother Zul went who was doing electrical engineering. So he went to Strathclyde and then my brother Shiraz who passed away last year, Fari's husband ..."

Farida Sarangi: "stayed in East Africa"

Shamim: "In January, he went to Makerere University in Kampala, that's where he met Fari. And when I finished my O-levels in 1970, I went to England to do my A-levels in England where Ash was in Loughborough, he was at Loughborough technical college, that was in 1970. So Ash, I, and Zul; in 1970 Zul completed his degree, came home for the summer and then he got a job

at Ontario Hydro Pickering Plant, Ontario Hydro it was called at that time. They went to England to recruit engineers from England because we didn't have enough engineers here. So they recruited my brother Zul and he got a job at the Pickering Power Plant here”

Ashrafali: “When we had what was called the milk round in England. The milk round is a couple of months or before graduation, they had a fair where all the companies would come and students interview and things like that. So they would say so many companies are coming, you look at them and then you see whether you want to apply for a job. Because I did the same, I applied for, four companies you can apply to, and I got four interviews and one second interview, and was offered a job but I didn't want to take it. So I came back home. Um, in June but in August we were kicked out so rang the same company and asked if the job was still open and they said yeah. So I started work as soon as I came back to England after leaving because I already had a job and they gave me a month's salary in advance so that I could have somewhere to stay and eat, things like that”

Altaf: “By then Zul had gone to Canada”

Shamim: “So by 1970, Zul was here in Canada. He came here in 1970.”

Ashrafali: “I still had a visa that I could enter England legally until September '72 because the visas were one year. September to September, the school year starts in September, so I could legally come to England. Zul was in Canada”

Shamim: “Zul was already here in 1970. So in 1971, I finished my A-levels I did the one year A-levels and I was accepted to Manchester University doing accounting. Oh I hated Manchester, it was the most dreary university in 1970”

Ashrafali: “Manchester now is a top notch city”

[laughter]

Shamim: "At that time in 1970, 1971, it was the industrial cesspit of England, ok. It was just like, the university was so dreary and I had spend a summer in Edinburgh, it was so beautiful, it was so nice right. And I'm going there and it was just awful, it was just so depressing, and it was just I couldn't stand it and I called, I rang my dad up and I said I'm not going to university. I hate it here, he asked Ash, and he said ok you're going to go to Canada. Your brother is there so you're going to go there. You can start your studies in Canada. So I came here in November 1971. Um, But I came on a visitor's visa, uh three-six months or whatever. And I went to a private college for computer science was just starting, computers were just starting. So, and also the university asked me to apply and I didn't have the proper visa and everything and I would have to start in September. So I already had an application to go to York University to start accounting again in 1972 but in the meantime like what am I gonna do for the rest of the year and there was this new opportunity for computer programming and it was a six month. So I started from February to August for the six months, thinking that in September I would go to university but then in August we found out that the Asians are being kicked out and that my father would be coming in October. We had three months, so in August we found out that, you know, they were kicked out. So my father was supporting us all this time so, um, because Zul was here and by this time I had already applied for permanent residency and with what was happening in Uganda, they gave my father applied to come to Canada because Zul and I were already here. He decided that he wasn't going to go to England, so Ash as he told you, he had already received a job to go there. And then how did Shiraz and Minaz, and Bobby get there?"

Ashrafali: "We applied to both Canada and England and then they decided that mom and dad and the youngest would go to Canada"

Shamim: "Who is they decided?"

Ashrafali: "The two governments, the British government"

Farida: "And Shiraz had been accepted at Strathclyde university at that time"

Ashrafali: "Coventry"

Shamim and Farida: "No Strathclyde"

Farida: "So he went to Strathclyde, my husband, Shiraz" [Shiraz & Minaz went to England as part of the Uganda Exodus in 1972 where Minaz stayed with Bobby to do his "O" levels while Shiraz went to University of Strathclyde]

Shamim: "Shiraz"

Ashrafali: "So we decided that the youngsters could go with mom and dad because Minaz"

Shamim: "No not Minaz"

Ashrafali: "Hanif and Altaf"

Altaf: "Me, my younger brother, and my mom and dad left from Ugandan to come to Canada"

Shamim: "And I think they gave them immigration status, they didn't come as refugees. I think they came as landed immigrants"

Altaf: "They came as landed immigrants, we had British Protectorate Passports"

Farida: "Yes, so my husband, Shiraz, also had a British passport so he could go to England and he was accepted at Strathclyde University"

Ashrafali: "We all had British Passports"

Shamim: "No we all had British Protectorate"

Altaf: "We had both, I remember I had a British Protectorate"

Shamim: "Mine still says British Protectorate"

Ashrafali: "Mine was Ugandan"

Shamim: "I still have mine"

Altaf: "Mine was British Protectorate"

Farida: "I think Shiraz's was British Protectorate too"

Shamim: "Mine was British Protectorate"

Ashrafali: "Mine was Ugandan, I had a Ugandan passport"

Shamim: "Um, but anyway they came as landed immigrants"

Altaf: "Bobby and Minaz came to England, they went to Loughborough"

Ashrafali: "Shiraz went to Strathclyde"

Altaf: "So there's four going this way and the other four went that way"

Mehboob Sarangi: "I went to England in 1971 and then uh Shiraz, Minaz came to stay with me"

Shamim: "So you went to England in 1971? Not in 1972?"

Mehboob: yes

Altaf: "No, he was there before, he left before"

Shamim: "Ok, so again you had completed your A levels?"

Mehboob: "Yeah"

Shamim: "You went to university then?"

Mehboob: "No another elder brother did. So I was there so Minaz and Shiraz came to live with me. Then Shiraz came to Straclyde and Minaz stayed with me."

Ashrafali: "Because I think I was over 18, I was issued a Uganda passport"

Shamim: "Yeah it could be yeah. Yeah I have mine too, it was British protectorate. So that's how it happened and then, my parents"

Altaf: "here it is, student August 1971, so you're right. A twelve month visa pass. This is like a museum piece"

Shezan: "A historical document"

Laughter

Altaf: "Yeah a historical document"

Shamim: "Actually the said to keep these old passports"

Mehboob: "Mom's and dad's are there"

Altaf: "Oh yeah?"

Shamim: "You have to keep them because I think there's some kind of a law that when you want to apply for old age or pension, they might ask you when did you land in Canada and you have to provide either your landed papers or your passport or something"

Farida: "I didn't have to provide anything"

Shamim: "So maybe they were, they've taken that off"

Altaf: "So Shiraz, Ash, Bobby, and Minaz were in England"

Farida: "Because Shiraz was still at Makerere University when all this happened so what they did, I think Strathclyde took some of the students to finish their degree, you know"

Ashrafali: "Why did I think it was Coventry"

Farida: "I was in coventry"

Ashrafali: "Oh that's why"

Farida: "I was at Warwick university"

Shamim: "So then they came in '72, here somewhere around October '72"

Altaf: "So we went from Entebbe to Paris, Paris to Montreal, and then from Montreal we took a train to Toronto because Zul and Shamim were in Toronto"

Shamim: "Do you want to ask about how they left Uganda and what happened during that three months?"

Shezan: "Yeah of course, please"

Shamim: "I wasn't there and so these people were there so these three can tell the story"

Mehboob: "No I wasn't there"

Shamim: "So these two will tell you"

Farida: "Shiraz was there"

Shamim: "Shiraz would've remembered everything"

Altaf: "He was the historian of the family"

Farida: "I do know from him telling us that they were asked to leave overnight they had to go and make sure that the passports were ok, everything. And he went to the passport office with a friend, I think it was Jali, and they went to the passport office in Kampala to make sure that, you know, their passports were alright to travel. And then they went there, they were harassed by all the police and everything and they had to take round about routes to get their passports done. And basically, they were all under surveillance with guns pointed to them all this time. And they just had to get suitcases, they couldn't even get suitcases because they had no way to even pack the stuff they want to bring. They were only allowed to bring only so much right?"

Ashrafali: "I think all my photographs and documents, were all left behind. We landed in England with just the clothes that we had."

Farida: "They also went to look for suitcases because they wanted to bring a few things like the clothes they were wearing. And they had to go near Lake Victoria somewhere to pick up some suitcases. And at that time there were also harassed by all these policemen and all the military people. So basically there were like under guns everywhere but anyway they managed to leave and he went to England."

Shamim: Gujarati

Shirin: Gujarati

Shamim: "The Nile River was swarming with black bodies"

Altaf: "So she's saying that they were killing. That there were tribal wars. That Idi Amin came from a certain tribe and Obote was from a certain tribe so there was very, even now, up to this date, there are still huge tribal wars. And she was saying there was a lot of killing but between the locals themselves and they would just throw them over into the River Nile in Jinja"

Farida: "There was a huge gorge so they would just throw the bodies over"

Shamim: "So they would come to the house with guns and they would just ask or whatever they would in the shop or whatever"

Altaf: "So I have a very vivid memory of two or three separate incidents that occurred, three incidents that occurred. 'Cause I was only twelve at that time, it was August of '72 so I was twelve at that time. So there were three specific incidents, I didn't know what was happening all around but I remember was I was at home with our maid and our house boy. And my father

was at work and my mom was at work and there was a knock at the front door. And the house boy, John, opened the door, and there were four military guys in uniform with assault rifles, like guns, and they asked if the man of the house is home. And John goes no, they peek in, so when you open the front door you can see the TV, sofas and a table and stuff”

Shamim: “The front door opened from the living room”

Altaf: “From the front, the living room, so you open the door here, the living room is there, there was a bedroom on the side, and the kitchen was further in the back and out. So they came in and said, I like that sofa and I like that and I like that. They opened up the front door and started taking things. They just took the things and they left, you couldn't say anything. They just took what they wanted, that was one incident. The other incident was when we were back in the park. This was the house, there was a park in the middle and then there was street going up and then there was houses going up here.”

Shamim: “That was at the back of the house”

Altaf: “At the back of the house, so this was the front of the house. And it was a Sunday, but before that these particular people living at this house [points to neighbour's house] had up and left, they had gone earlier, they were Indian, there were some Indian people there that had up and left. As soon as they left, the next day a big corporal moved into the house and had taken it over. And they were staying in that house there. It was just a week before, and it was a Sunday and there were a lot of kids around and they would go and play in the park. Like it was mentioned our neighbor had a couple of dogs, so the dogs would be out, the kids would be out. We would be out in the park playing soccer, volleyball whatever just playing around. It was like 9 o'clock in the morning and we're playing with the dogs around us, we were playing. And all of a sudden we hear a gunshot, like a big gunshot. The dog that was playing beside us, cause it was making a lot of noise, the corporal shot the dog. With the kids playing with us but he got up, he took aim, and he shot the dog because it was making too much noise. Everybody

scattered, man, [laughter]. We woke him up with the noise in the morning because he was sleeping. He got up because he didn't like the noise and right with the kids who were just playing around. Imagine if he had missed or done anything else. And then there's another story, that was sort of incident number two. The third story, Shiraz, my older brother was going, it was in the evening, like eight o'clock at night. He was going over to a friend's place to pick up some school books or something"

Shamim: "In a car"

Altaf: "So we had a Toyota, or maybe a Datsun"

Shamim: "It was a sports car"

Altaf: "It was a Toyota, I think it was a Toyota Corolla or a Datsun. It was a Datsun, it was a nice new car. My dad had nice cars."

Shamim: "My dad was a car offciando"

Altaf: "Yeah he liked nice cars. So Shiraz took the keys and asked who wants to come on the drive to Shiraz Sumar's place. I said yeah I'm coming. We came out we went three blocks around we moved and we parked in the driveway of Shiraz Sumar's house. It was a new car, like Ma says. So we stop the car and we're just about to open the doors and three men in masks and guns they threw the door open, took me, I was twelve. They took me by the neck and flung me in the bushes. They took my brother's glasses so he couldn't see and then made him lie down and the neighbours opened the door and they said stay in or made them stay in. They took the car and they took off. They stole the car and left. Apparently, they had robbed something down the street before. They had robbed some stores and they were robbers so they needed a get away car. At that time, there weren't many cars. So they flung me, they flung Shiraz and they took off. So we reported the car stolen and then about two days later my dad

gets a call from the Police saying ok your car is found, it's on this street like out of down. Go and get your own car, so dad says ok fine, because the cops don't want to go and get the car. My dad goes to get the car and the car has like 100 bullets in it. The glass is all shattered, there's blood all over the seats. So they had a big gun fight, the cops and the robbers. Can you imagine if they had just kept us in the car or something else had happened?"

Shamim: "They could've killed you"

Altaf: "Easily, they could've just taken us out and shot us"

Shamim: "Thank God they just threw you out"

Altaf: "So I remember, dad brought the car because nobody else wanted to - they were very superstitious"

Farida: "People had died in that car so no one wanted to get in that car and drive it"

Altaf: "they were very superstitious about not being in the car. So my dad brought the car and pulled it into the driveway with the family and everybody is looking at this car and going oh my God. You can imagine what would have happened cause there were stories, people all around were trying to leave. As it was mentioned we were being harassed on the street or stopped for whatever reason and there was always the military around with guns. So whatever they wanted, they just took. And they said oh nice watch and they just took it. So they just took control"

Shamim: "There was another incident that happened with Shiraz was there and Minaz was there, I thought you might have been there when they were in the post office and they were trying to mail some books and they weren't allowed to"

Altaf: "No I wasn't there"

Shamim: "Do you know that story?"

Altaf: "No"

Mehboob: "I have that"

Shamim: "You remember that story so tell us"

Mehboob: "No, I remember somebody getting whipped"

Shamim: "Ok, so I can't remember the story totally because it is not my memory, I was not there but I had heard it. If my brother Minaz was there he would know. Apparently the gist of it was that they were trying to mail some books and they were in the post office and they had these boxes that were trying to mail"

Altaf: "School books"

Shamim: "School books and stuff like that. And uh, you know, the guy at the post office, the military man that was there. They were always there with their guns. And they said no you are not allowed to mail this, or you're not allowed to mail books, or why are you mailing this stuff, or what's in your parcel? And they didn't allow them to mail these books and one of my brothers talked back"

[Laughter]

Shamim: "So I think they did talk back and said it is just school books and they were slapped around and told to go back and go back home. And they weren't allowed to mail their books or

anything like that. These were just incidents and again thank God they were slapped around, beaten a little bit and sent back home because they could have just as easily been killed right?"

Ashrafali: "And when people were going to the airport they were being stopped"

Shamim: "I was just going to ask my mother"

Ashrafali: "People were being stopped, the only thing, no documents, no photographs, nothing."

Shamim: "We don't have anything"

Altaf: "So I remember that too cause I had vivid memories because I was smaller and we were going to the airport in our car with our luggage and stuff. We had at least seven to ten stops. Every time we entered a small town, you couldn't go twenty or thirty miles without being stopped. And every time you were stopped they'd want something. They'd want to take something. So they'd make you open up your luggage. So I remember when I was like leaving, my mom gave me some gold chains, you know, we had some jewelry at home so she put the chains on kids and a couple a watches and rings. By the time we got to the airport, we had nothing. They took everything off you, they went through the luggage. Other than actual clothes they took everything"

Shamim: "And you also had to give them money. Like my dad had kept a lot of money to give right?"

Shirinkanu: Gujarati

Shamim: Gujarati

Shirinkanu: Gujarati

Altaf: "They would open up the luggage and take whatever they liked. Even clothing, if they liked that sweater they would take that sweater"

Farida: Gujarati

Shirinkanu: Gujarati, "you opened the door of your car and then you put things inside"

Farida: "The panels of the car were where some people tried to put jewellery. I know that some women had hidden some of their jewellery that way."

Shamim: "Some women would sew their jewellery in their clothes, in the hem of their clothes or inside the folds of their clothes but my mother just put it in the panels of the car. She had also sent packages" Gujarati

Shirinkanu: Gujarati

Shamim: "My mother had sent out a couple of boxes and in one of the boxes she had put her jewellery but that box didn't even reach us. A lot of boxes never reached us"

Shirinkanu: Gujarati

Altaf: "But at the end of the day I think we were lucky because there were a lot of stories where people tried to leave and you'd never hear from them again" Gujarati

Shamim: Gujarati

Shirinkanu: Gujarati

Altaf: "We were lucky that in our family nobody really got hurt and we were all safe"

Shirinkanu: Gujarati

Farida: "If they asked for anything and you don't give it"

Shamim: "Or if you give any protest"

Altaf: "They're very picky on the restrictions"

Shamim: "Just give it without making any noise. And my mother and my father whatever that they wanted. My father kept a lot of money and gave, he bribed everybody. Whatever they wanted he would say ok, here's this money, let us go. So he kept quite a lot of money hidden everywhere so that at every check point he could give some to them."

Shirinkanu: Gujarati

Altaf: "Our neighbour had no money"

Shamim: "And he also protested giving anything from the house"

Altaf: "So they just went to his house and they just killed him"

Shamim: "They just shot him down" Gujarati

Shirinkanu: Gujarati

Altaf: "Other than the earrings that my mom was wearing everything else was taken"

Shamim: "And you had to show them cause they knew Indian women had jewelry right? So you couldn't hide everything either because then they would know something fishy is going on. So you had to wear quite a bit to tell them that this is what we have and they took that. But my mother had also hidden a little bit. Very little"

Altaf: "Just a little"

Shirinkanu: Gujarati

Altaf: "So our new neighbours from the street, they also came to my house at night and they said what do you have? My father said take whatever you want. If you resisted any, any resistance, you'd be gone."

Shamim: "So at the front of our house, it was on a street right. So on the other side of the street there were houses and the back of our house backed on to the park. So my dad was in the front of the house. Some military men had moved into some of the houses, not from the back but also from the front. As soon as people left"

Altaf: "As soon as people left they just came into the house"

Shamim: "It was like, possession was 99% of the law right. So as soon as the house was empty, somebody would move in. If they didn't move in another black colonel or captain or whoever would. So whoever was the first one there, or the big person was the next in line or whatever, would move in right. As soon as people started leaving people would just start moving in the same day or the very next day. So my parents left towards the end, they didn't leave right away"

Altaf: "We left right, end of October I think, August, September, October, so almost in the last couple of weeks"

Shamim: "Yeah so not right at the very end but towards the end."

Altaf: "I think my father thought for sure somebody would take care of Idi Amin and it would go back to normal. And he was a businessmen right? So we had some stuff around, so we could afford to stick around because we had stuff to give to other people. Because if you didn't have stuff to give you would be shot or something would happen to you."

Shamim: "So people had moved in, and every time, she was saying she remembers one time my dad was outside in the front and these people came in and said what do you have. My dad said come in our house and whatever you want, take it. They took some paintings"

Shirinkanu: Gujarati

Shamim: "So that's how, and then as they were leaving they had to bribe people too because we lived in Mbale"

Altaf: "I remember, I was small but I remember they stops. They'd make you get out, you know, you'd stand on the street and they'd go through your stuff. Because I know mom had given me two or three watches and rings and necklaces, nothing lasted to the airport"

Shamim: "And we lived about 120 miles north of Entebbe. There was only one airport and everybody had to go through there so there was quite a lot of traveling from Mbale to Entebbe. Did you leave with them?"

Ashrafali: "We went together"

Shamim: "Do you remember the journey? No, you don't remember the journey. But those are the stories we heard about the journey. So then they came here. So my parents, my brother Zul

had already bought a house in the Riverdale area here near Gerrard and Pape. So he had a house on Victor Street there”

Altaf: “Victor Avenue”

Shamim: “Yeah Victor avenue”

Altaf: “112? or?”

Shamim: “221 Victor Avenue I think and my brother and I were living there. He had bought the house and he was renting a couple of rooms to somebody. And so when my parents and my brothers came over he rented that house to my parents and he went to live in Pickering or somewhere. And uh, so my dad within the very week, he found a shop, a convenience store right on Gerrard at Pape. Right, it was north-east corner”

Altaf: “Northwest corner”

Shamim: “Northwest was later”

Altaf: “No, southwest was the big shop, the first shop was north-east corner, I remember”

Shamim: “Yeah northeast that's what I'm saying”

Altaf: “It was a little convenience store, not even the size of this room”

Shamim: “Northeast corner”

Altaf: “My dad didn't even have the money, I think he was walking around the neighbourhood and he was chatting with the owner of the store”

Shamim: "It was for sale"

Altaf: "And he offered the guy, I think it was \$5,000 for all the inventory. He went to my brother to ask for a loan to open up the store"

Shamim: "Zul borrowed the money from the bank, cause he was working"

Comments from Zul sarangi

"Dad, mom, Altaf and Hanif arrived at Toronto train station one Saturday morning in 1972. I went to greet them and bring them to my home, which I had vacated to accommodate the family. Suli and I had moved to an apartment and Shamim, who was living with me, stayed at the home on 221 Victor Av. with the family.

I came for visit the next Monday, when dad told me that he needed \$5,000 to buy a business. I was a bit surprised because he had just arrived in a western country only 2 days ago and had no clue as to the business environment. \$5,000 is no big deal today for any of us, but at the time, I had arrived in Canada only 2 years before, with only \$20 in my pocket and no family infrastructure to rely on, and then, in 1972, had barely enough money to buy a car and put down money for the house we had purchased just months ago. So it was a big deal to come up with the money on short order.

He purchased a business that the seller was basically winding down because he wanted to emigrate to Pakistan.

I don't know how dad grew the business without having more capital to buy inventory. But he did and ended up renting a much larger store on south side of Pape. He had transformed the business into an Indian Grocery Store. I recall that to cater to immigrants (mostly from East

Africa), he offered home delivery of grocery, in a city as big as Toronto!! He would take the orders and I would go to the shop on Saturday and Sunday, load up the car (a Mustang, so did not have much cargo space) and make deliveries, mostly to large apartment complexes in Massy Sq. and Donland.

I also recall dad asking me how much I was making. He said he would guarantee me at least that much money if I joined him full time so that together, we open up another store and also go into import business. My answer was that he was crazy! I said I work 7 hours a day, 35 hours a week, with many benefits, but most important, I had time for family. If I were to work his hours, 12 hours a day, 7 days a week, I would have no time for my family!

I was transferred to Bruce. When I left, the family had no vehicle for deliveries. Minaz had to deliver the groceries using public transportation! At some point it became impossible to deliver orders and by then the business was growing enough to stop doing that.

It is a testament to dad that at age of 53, arriving at a strange country, with a wife and 2 kids to support, with no capital except for what he borrowed from me, he established a thriving business and built himself a good nest egg so that he could retire in comfort."

Shirinkanu: Gujarati

Shamim: "\$150 dollars she would pay back but she was saying that"

Farida: "They borrowed \$5,000 so they were paying back \$150 a month"

Shamim: "Good will and whatever was in the store, the inventory and good will. So then he, my dad started it. So it was like a convenience store but then he started selling Indian food stuffs. He was the first"

Altaf: "The second Indian store in Toronto to sell groceries"

Shirinkanu: Gujarati

Altaf: "Ours was the first Indian store in Toronto in '72, one week after we landed. Cause my dad was importing because we had a store in Uganda and he had connections in India. So he, you know, had the truck business so he was transporting flour, wheat, rice, all those things. All the spices"

Shamim: "But when he came here, he wasn't importing. Initially he wasn't"

Altaf: "The story was the he tried to buy from India"

Shamim: "That was later but first there was a uh a Hindu guy. There was a wholesaler"

Farida: "He used to buy everything in cash so that they would give him a little bit of a discount"

Shamim: "So things started slowly. Things like wheat and flour he could get from anywhere but slowly he started to buy from this Indian place"

Altaf: "After he was making enough money he would go to this whole sale guy Shah. The wholesaler would not sell discounted prices to my dad. And so my dad was not making enough profits."

Shamim: "Eventually, initially he would but that was later, a few years later that he started to have bigger ambitions but initially when we first started"

Shirinkanu: Gujarati

Shamim: Gujarati "So when we first started, like she's saying later as my father got used to the business starting he had connection but initially when we first started"

Altaf: "It was local stuff, like a Canadian grocery store, like a convenience store"

Shamim: "And he started very soon after, because I was helping him in the store, I was 19 at that time. So when they came, so in August when we found out that they're coming here. Um, I decided I wasn't gonna borrow money to go to university. So I already had my high school education. I had already got that private computer diploma, so I thought ok, we don't have money we have to all buckle down and work. So I got a job at the Royal Bank as a data clerk. So I would work four to twelve midnight shifts and during the day when my father started the business, so from ten to two I would help him in the business. And then he would go home at twelve to have his lunch, he was still used to taking a little seista in the afternoon. So I would get in around ten o'clock and I would look after the shop until two and he would go home. Because we were within walking distance, our store and our house were like five minute we could walk right? So then he would come back around 2:30 and I would go straight to work from the shop, downtown to the royal bank and I would work from four to twelve. Come back around one o'clock, sleep in until around 9 and then get ready and go. So initially the first month, two or three months it was just a regular local store but then slowly he started changing it into an Indian store. He started getting more Indian food stuffs and making connections and he would, I remember him, going down, we had a basement of the store and he would buy this 100 pound flour or 100 pounds rice bags right? And he would climb up the stairs, he was 53 when he came here, my mother was 46, there's a six year difference between the two. He was 53, he would walk up these rickety dark steps with these 100 pound bags that he would bring it to the store and he would divide that into five, two pounds, ten pounds bags. And we didn't have machines like right now. You can have the machines that you can staple. He would measure everything, weight it, and he would roll it up and staple it, label it by hand. We had to write the labels and label it, and that's how we started. Honest to God. That was a lot of work and on weekends"

Altaf: "I remember Bobby taking the bags down. I took all the bags down. Shiraz took bags down, Minaz took bags down, the whole family worked in the store"

Shamim: "But they came later but initially it was my father and I because Shiraz came a year later, Bobby came two or three years later"

Mehboob: "six years"

Shamim: "They came later, ok, so initially, the first few days the first few months because the store started within a week right? So after the first week it was my dad, my mom, and myself. It was the three of us that were running that business and then later, Shiraz came."

Farida: "They opened a second store"

Shamim: "That was much later"

Mehbood: "That was when I came"

Shamim: "I went first to Broadview and Danforth, I was the first one that went there. Dad asked me if I could handle it after work because I was working four to midnight in the first year but then after that I got myself a programming job when I was working mornings. So then I would come straight from work and go to the store and work with him until nine o'clock and my mother was doing things at home. She was making ghantiya and chevro and things like that, snacks, and then we would sell it at the store. So Shiraz came a year later but I think he helped for about six months and then he and Fari got married in 1974, December 1974 right? I think Shiraz came late 1973 and then I think in '74 he went back to England, he and my mother went back to England and he got married and that was that. And by this time Altaf was getting much older so he would start coming to the store and helping out"

Altaf: "Before school and after school"

Shamim: "Um,"

Altaf: "Minaz was at the store."

Shamim: "Minaz was very rarely at the store because he was playing a lot. He was hardly there and then my dad gave him a choice and then he decided to go and live at the university"

Comment from Minaz sarangi

"Shiraz & I went to England as part of the Uganda Exodus in 1972 where I stayed with Bobby to do my "O" levels while Shiraz went to University of Strathclyde. I arrived in Canada in Sept 1973 after Dad called me to help with the business. Since 1973, while training with the Team Ontario (1974) & later the Canadian Field hockey team (1977), I worked at the shop and doing a lot of deliveries all over Toronto on the TTC. I went to the University & decided to stay in the residence because I had 2 part-time jobs, one at the University coaching Squash / Tennis while training with the Canadian Team. There was never a discussion with Dad - I told him I was staying in Residence. At that point, I was not coming to work at the shop.

Regarding racism, around Massey Square, there were always shouts of "pakis go home" and Shiraz & I did get into small altercations and we had an incident at the University with some football players but overall, it was a lot less than what the recent Muslim immigrants are facing."

Altaf: "My dad had a reputation, not just local in Toronto but outside people from the USA coming in so these long weekends, I remember. So my dad worked at the store for eight years. He retired in 1980"

Shamim: “'83”

Mehboob: “'81”

Atlaft: “'81, '81, so in the nine years that he worked my dad never took a day off”

Mehboob: “No he did take days off”

Shamim: “He did take days off but they were very seldom”

Mehboob: “I was there every Sunday, I opened the store and I closed”

Shamim: “So when did you come?”

Mehboob: “late '78”

Shamim: “But before that he never took a day off because before that it was just me, Altaf, and mom and dad. So we would give him half a days off, I would help out you know, Saturday, Sunday”

Altaf: “He never took a sick day, he never went to the doctor because our biggest and most busiest time was the weekends and long weekends. So it's not like now when people close on Monday to take a day off or Tuesday”

Shamim: “Never took a day off, it was open every day from nine to nine”

Altaf: “Even longer no?”

Shamim: "nine to nine"

Altaf: "Twelve hours a day, everyday"

Shamim: "But by the time you came home and everything it would be fourteen hours. Nine to nine every single day, we never closed Christmas, new years, my wedding day, it didn't matter that store was open everyday"

Atlaft: "From that store we bought a much bigger store"

Shamim: "That came a little later, initially we had that one store and then my dad, so I was working days now and I would help him out after work every day and weekends. I would come home and work. So he asked me, could he buy another store at Broadview and Danforth and would I look after it. Because he would look after it during the day. Bobby were you there yet?"

Mehboob: "I came in '76, then I was running the store"

Shamim: "I was running it for a while"

Farida: "Shiraz was running there just before we got married"

Altaf: "Everybody was running the store" everyone did their best, under their individual circumstance, to help out the family and the family business

Farida: "When we decided to get married that's when he thought it was time to get a job. That's when he told dad that he's not going to be able to work in the store anymore. At that time the store was not doing very well anyway"

Shamim: "Right"

Farida: "And then your dad decided to sell"

Mehboob: "No he didn't sell it right away because I was still working there"

Shamim: "So Shiraz might have been doing it during the day and then I was going in the evenings and then after Shiraz got married then that was it. Shiraz wasn't coming over anymore. Then I got married in '76 and Bobby came. When Bobby came, then I got married and then he took over. But then after that it only stayed for a couple more years"

Mehboob: "A year or a year and a half, there was a fire"

Shamim: "Then it wasn't doing very well so then he closed that store"

Mehboob: "And then my dad was getting older and I went to the other store"

Shamim: "Then we closed, there was an issue with the landlord"

Altaf: "It was too small anyway"

Shamim: "The original shop we had was too small"

Altaf: "Across the street there was a much bigger store. Right now it's into three different, there's three stores there. It's subdivided into three stores"

Shamim: "There's a big story in that too. That building used to belong to a Greek guy next door. So my dad gave him a lot of money up front so he gave my dad a lease. A ten year lease at a very good rental price. So we now have this store on the Southwest corner of Pape and

Gerrard. And it was a big store and right on that, I don't know what was the street name, and right there was a gurdwara.”

Mehboob: “About a block and a half”

Shamim: “There was a gurdwara there, so we had a lot of business and that store was doing really well. It was a really good store and we were quite well known and people would come from a long place to come to our store”

Altaf: “A lot of people from the US as well. Like a lot of weekend, long weekends it would be packed”

Shamim: “People from out of town, people from Kitchener”

Altaf: “And we also hand delivered. So we did delivery on the TTC. We'd have shopping bags, Minaz, and I remember Shiraz, we used to take, we didn't have a car then. We'd take the shopping to Don Mills and that area. For two years we did hand delivery”

Shamim: “We did that for a little bit”

Altaf: “We struggled hard. As a family everybody had input in that store and we worked like dogs. Some more, some very little, but still”

Shamim: “So that store, the one on the Southwest corner, the reason my dad gave it up in 1981, was the Greek owner from, the Greek gentlemen my dad's age who had given the lease and um, was friends with my dad. When he passed away his property went to his son and the son wanted more rent, he let the property go really. On top of the store were apartments and he let it go really, he wouldn't fix anything, it deteriorated. So the people who were in the apartments complained to the city. So the city came and said it was not habitable so they would

have to condemn the entire building, not just the apartments. Now this was all applauded by the son because the son wanted to get my father out so that he could re-do it and rent it out at the current rental price because that area now became, because they put in a new plaza there”

Altaf: “There's a big huge mall that came in, Gerrard Square, they built it while we were there”

Shamim: “So we had gone into the Southwest corner and so on the Northeast corner, that whole thing became a huge mall. So that area became very prosperous, and the rents went up tremendously. My dad had a locked in ten year lease for a very low rent, so this guy, the young guy felt he was being, he couldn't do anything because this was the legal lease. So that was his ploy to get my father out. So he uh, so the city condemned the place in 1981, that's why the store had to be closed, we had to close it. When the owner, the new owner divided it into three, there was a pizza pizza in there, two or three other businesses and was getting good rents. So my dad took him to court. He won the case but the guy skipped town, he went back to Greece. So even though he got the order, there was nothing to be served, there was nothing he could do about it. Then my dad asked Bobby if he should open a new business and he said he was not interested. So bobby worked there for five years from 76-81. He said he was not interested in the business and my dad was by this time in his late 60's, 63 or something and he was just starting to get eczema, he smoked a lot. So he was just starting to get eczema, it was just about '83, in '83 he would have been 64. So in '81, it took a while or so”

Altaf: “He found out before he sold the store, yeah, yeah, that's why he let it go”

Shamim: “I'm not sure of that, according to my memory, ok, I remember this, that he”

Bobby: “He had a mild heart attack, before”

Shamim: “Because in '83 he gave up smoking, I remember because Kamal was born then and that's when he found out he had eczema, and that's when he stopped smoked. But in '81, the

reason he stopped the business was not because of his health issues it was because he went to court and the shop was closed but he needed help to run the business. Bobby was the only one who was not working. The rest of us were all working or in university, I was now married”

Altaf: “Hanif was in grade twelve and I was in second year university.”

Shamim: “He was making his own business. In '81 the reason my father gave up the business was because the stores closed, he had to now decide should he open a new one or not but he needed help. Bobby was not interested, the rest of us were all working, established families and what not right so?”

Altaf: “At that time he didn't need to work. In the nine years when we came here with nothing and he still put all the kids through school and in nine years when he retired. He bought a house cash, cause during that time we were renting. He bought a house cash”

Shamim: “No we already had that one condominium at the Massey square”

Altaf: “Yeah we were living there, we had one apartment building. One, two bedroom condo in Massey Square”

Shamim: “Which we bought a long time ago like in '74” Gujarati

ShirinKanu: Gujarati

Altaf: “So we moved from the Pape and Gerrard area to 1 Massey Square, those buildings down south. Then we had one unit and then so I remember because we used to go, we used to take the TTC half an hour forty minutes to get to work everyday.”

Shamim: "To go to the store"

Altaf: "Because I used to go to school right, at Riverdale which is right beside the store. So I was still going to the same school and then we bought another unit in Massey Square"

Mehboob: "No no, we didn't buy it there."

Altaf: "So once we finished that, we bought the house at Bellamy and rented the three and dad had bought another unit"

Shamim: "Later, after he sold the house he bought the other one. After he sold the house he bought the other two units"

Altaf: "But at 64 he retired not having to work anymore. Nine years he worked, worked his butt off. So in his life there were three times that he had nothing. When he came to Uganda; when he had an incident with the cop and he had nothing; and then when he left Uganda to come here. Three times in his life he had nothing. And he build successful businesses with eight kids. And all of us, most of us, I think all of us have university education"

Shamim: "Except me, I have a college degree, I went back to school when I was fifty and I have a college diploma now."

Altaf: "All the kids have university degrees"

Shamim: "Everybody else except myself. And Bobby had two but he never actually picked them up but that's beside the point"

Altaf: "So he struggled, the struggle from coming from India to Uganda, getting his own business. Then losing everything, and building up another successful business, then losing it

again to come to Canada at age fifty-three. And in another nine years being able to have enough money that all his kids he fulfilled his promise to put through school and then to never work for the rest of his life”

Shamim: “Like even then, his third one too, he would have continued on, honestly, like he would have not closed. But once it closed and he was starting to get health issues”

Altaf: “And none of us wanted to get into the business because all of us had education and said why would I want to work with my hands. We all wanted to be professionals”

Shamim: “In the 1980s we all wanted to be professionals”

Shezan: “And then there was another store, in the Danforth?”

Altaf: “We sold that one?”

Shezan: “When did you guys sell that one?”

Altaf: “We sold that in '78”

Shamim: “Like I think around '78 or when Bobby came”

Altaf: “Two years after Bobby came it closed. It was right, if you look at the Toronto map, Broadview station. When you come out of Broadview you go north there's a strip of shops ours was like the third shop there. You got off the subway and you walked to our store, it was right there. But the location was, it didn't have the traffic as the one in Pape and Gerrard. It didn't have the walk in traffic, the gurdwara people”

Shamim: "You had to know about it, it was a little bit out of the way. It just wasn't doing as well as we would have liked. And we had a big store there on the corner of pape and gerrard and slowly and slowly all of us were starting our own lives. We had our own lives and so it was just him, my mother, and Bobby doing the work"

Altaf: "I was there the whole time. Hanif my younger brother worked but I worked throughout the whole time, twelve until twenty one"

Shamim: "I remember briefly, you were at university so you would come in on the weekends. So but it, it, they were required for the one store. The store was doing well enough that it required another person because he was still doing everything by hand."

Altaf: "He was very meticulous, everything was by hand"

Shamim: "Everything was precise"

Chantale: "What year was it when we were dating and your dad offered the business to us?"

Altaf: "'81, when he was closing down. He asked Bobby, he asked me. He asked me, and I said no thanks. I could've worked for ten years and retired like my dad. I've been working for thirty years now and I'm still not retired."

Mehboob: "You would've been dead. We'd get a delivery from let's say from uh India or Kenya or somewhere. You'd get two truckloads"

Altaf: "The eighteen wheeler"

Mehboob: "100 pound bags, 160 pound boxes, I mean hundreds of them and you would have to take them downstairs, all the way in the basement"

Ashrafali: "They came in containers. You had to buy them in container loads which was two lorries"

Shamim: "And at that time, nowadays we have a lot of Indians who are here that are willing to work but at that time we didn't have anyone. And at that time it was just at the cusp before a big influx of Indians came"

Altaf: "You've heard of little India, at Gerrard and Coxwell, so we were there before Gerrard Coxwell came up"

Shamim: "So it was all family businesses and Bobby hasn't worked a day in his life since"

laughter

Mehboob: "Because I hurt my back"

Altaf: "So I have a story. Two years ago (2014), I'm doing a job and I get a call from a client. My partner says, oh my client is gonna call you. He's got a tax question, so I pick up the phone and goes hi this is, I forget his name. So he goes hi, your name is Altaf Sarangi and I go yes Sarangi, did you guys have a store at Pape and Gerrard, yes that was my dad's store. And he goes, you know what? And this guy is a rich guy a CEO of a big company. He goes, I used to deliver, I was the truck driver that used to deliver all those groceries to your stores. I said you've got to be kidding me, and he goes no man. I remember those few kids that would come up and help and pull all the rice bags, those 100 pound bags. I told him I used to carry those bags, do you remember that basement? And he goes yeah. I couldn't believe it, that he is a CEO of a big company, and he used to drive trucks. He goes man, I hated that job"

Laughter

Altaf: "He goes Altaf, I hated that job but I remember that store"

Shamim: "See, then you can become a CEO"

Altaf: "I could not believe that he was telling me that, I have to meet him now"

Shamim: "So any way that was it, he didn't need to work after that. The point was he never took any social assistance. He worked his butt off, like all of us worked our butts off."

Altaf: "If you look at the family, all the family has done well. All of them are professionals"

Crosstalk

Shamim: "Any way do you have any questions?"

Shezan: "Yeah ok, um what's the fun question. So then how was adjusting to winter? Like your guys' first winter?"

Shamim: "I'll tell you a story. So you can imagine my parents were a little depressed, ok, especially my mom was really depressed"

Altaf: "It was right at the start of the winter"

Shamim: "Two or three months. So I remember this story so well. So my mom wanted a hat, ok? So it's winter let's go. So there was a shop close by or something. So I took her in, she tried one hat on and I said oh that doesn't look good on you and my mother starts crying in the middle of the story. I felt so bad, I hurt her feelings"

Shirinkanu: Gujarati

Shamim: Gujarati "I can understand she was just so, it was just so overwhelming right. And it's understandable" Gujarati

Ashrafli: "We would wear them in Mbale when we were way up in the mountain. The winter was 75 degrees Fahrenheit the summer was 85 - 90. You couldn't get better weather, no humidity, and you could see the rain coming. I rained for about 2 or 3 hours in the afternoon and that was it. It was just perfect, no mosquitos, no humidity, and then come to a place where it gets to minus thirty"

Shamim: "The first winter was very difficult for my mother, I remember that so distinctly"

Altaf: "I remember as a kid, my first experience with winter. So as refugees we didn't have proper clothing. I had a jacket, I went to school, and I was, my mom and dad put me two grade lower because of my younger brother. So there was 3 different schools - grades one to six; seven and eight; and then high school right? So I was supposed to be in eight but my younger brother was in four. So they put us both in the same school. So when I went to school, I kind of knew everything, I didn't have to study, I didn't have to do anything. So I was into sports, a lot of sports. So I specialized soccer, basketball, and volleyball, those were the sports I played through my entire life. But um, so I remember because there was a big park two blocks north of Pape and Gerrard. So there was a rink, they would take students and you'd do skating. So I remember, and I was sports oriented and I was playing all kinds of sports. So I went skating. So I go there and I didn't have skates, so I borrowed somebody's skates, someone gave me skates, so tight that my feet were numb, completely numb. I had a jacket which was like a spring jacket, it was minus twenty degrees, and it was like a spring jacket, so I was freezing my ass off. So I went skating and I was on my ass the entire. You know what I have never and to this day I have, I don't watch hockey, because I get flashbacks of the ice. I never learned how to skate.

For sports in that winter time, for classes you had to go skating. Everybody had to learn how to skate. Man, I never learned how to skate, I hated the ice, to this day I don't watch hockey”

Shamim: “But I remember my first winters both in England and here. Like when I went to England in 1970, I wanted to try everything. Right so somebody took me ice skating, for the very first time, so I will try everything once. So I get on there and I'm full of confidence and I'm gonna be fine. First few steps and I fall down and I landed on my elbow and I cracked my elbow. That was the first and only time I every went ice skating. I never ever learned how to skate. I did not want to put on another pair of skates because breaking your elbow is very painful. It really painful so that was the end of that. So in England”

Altaf: “I remember I had running shoes the entire winter. I used to walk to school which was two and a half blocks away in runners. And whenever there were breaks, we would be outside and I would be there in my runners. And, my parents were buying me running shoes, I think every three months of four months. I played so much sports. Shoes wouldn't even last me a month because I played a lot of sports. But in the winter they tear, like I tear all my shoes because I was wearing them everywhere. But I never had winter shoes.”

Shamim: “When I first came here in 1971 it was the same thing. My brother was renting an apartment right here. At Malten and Warden and I came in November '71, I didn't have any boots or anything. When I first came in 1971, and I remember this so distinctly, like there was an ice, the very first week there was an ice storm. And I didn't have boots, I was wearing my regular high heel shoes. I come out of the, I open the lobby door, I come out and there's just a huge gust of wind, it was a very windy icy storm. And I open the door and I let go and I fly across. The front of the lobby there, land right on my cheek. And my cheek was totally cut, like totally bleeding because it was such an icy storm. I didn't have boots, I didn't have a jacket because the winter here and in England are different. It was very painful”

Altaf: "The winter was harsh. I remember the first couple of winters were very harsh. But I think we all struggled through it."

Shamim: "It was totally different"

Altaf: "But we have stayed in the Toronto area for almost 44 years. The whole family has been around here."

Shezan: "And then those first interactions with Canadians, how were those? How was that?"

Gujarati

Altaf: "My recollection, I didn't have any problems assimilating at all."

Ashrafali: "The only reason we didn't have any problems is because of my dad. He was, he said we are in a different country because just imagine this. We were Muslims, Ismailis, we went to mosque everyday at seven o'clock, we didn't drink, we didn't smoke, we did everything and when we come to a country like that and within a year, two years probably. No three or four years, I am with a divorced woman, who is white, and not married and has a child and she comes here to Canada to meet my father. So this is an English girl much older than me, not married and has a child and he took her in and never said a word. You live in a country where things are different from home and you do whatever they do"

Shamim: "Like do in Rome as, you know, Romans do"

Ashrafali: "You know he was so liberal, you think that Altaf is Chantale who is Singh, Hindu, Shamim's husband is French-Canadian, and then I'm with an English women, and Minaz was with a Canadian girl, so you know"

Altaf: "We have many mixed marriages in our family"

Ashrafali: "but my father never said anything. He never, ever, complained. He never said anything to make anyone feel not welcome in the family and that is why we have got on so well with wherever we've been because of his attitude"

Altaf: "I never had any problems. I don't remember having any issues in school"

Ashrafali: "Things were different in England. We were told things like bloody Paki and all that"

Farida: "And that happened to Shiraz and us. At that time, you know, we were from East Africa but they called us Paki"

Ashrafali: "We never had a problem, we met with friends"

Farida: "At work or socially, we've never had any issues. Never"

Shamim: "When we were living in Massey Square, I don't know if it happened to you"

Altaf: "It happened to me a lot in Toronto but I don't look at it as a negative. They'd have gangs, that area, the Massey Square, Victoria Park, and Danforth Area. A lot of Ismailis down there. A lot of Indian people, during that time in the mid '80s. And so yeah there was, when we moved there, there were gangs and if you go at night you'd have to be careful and go around the gangs. But to us, it wasn't an issue"

Ashrafali: "But none of us had a fight"

Altaf: "Minaz and Shiraz had a couple fights. I had a couple but no big deal, we don't look at it as a negative. Like things happen when you grow up as a kid. It happens here in Toronto all the time"

Shamim: "I remember a few incidences when we were in Massey Square."

Farida: "I think Massey Square was very famous for that. It was in that area"

Shamim: "I think there was a lot of white working class people that were being disrupted or had to move out because the Asians were moving in. So there was a lot of incidences of racism, yeah. So they would call names and what not"

Altaf: "They were predominantly Asians"

Shamim: "Later, now it's still all Asian. So there were people who would call you names. Paki go home, or whatever you know. There were quite a few incidences. I actually had an incidence at our shop one time. I was there alone and Hanif was there, strange enough. You never used to see him at the store, it was a Sunday afternoon and there was only the two of us. Only the two of us. And this young, and I never mentioned it to my mom or my dad or anybody, I never told this to anybody. My parents would be just mortified, they would feel compelled, they would feel guilty that it was there fault or whatever. I never mentioned this. Anyway, I was there alone, and Hanif was there, he was young. He was ten or twelve I think. It was a Sunday afternoon and this guy came in, a young white guy. It was at Pape and Gerrard, the smaller store, our first store. We hadn't moved across to the new store or anything. And he grabbed a coke can and uh didn't wanna pay for it. And I confronted him and he grabbed my hair and he grabbed me around the neck or whatever and Hanif was crying, he didn't know what to do. I had this habit of taking out my slippers and beating the younger kids with my slipper. So I managed to get my slipper out, trying to hit him because he had grabbed me form the back of the hair as he was trying to choke me. With one hand he took my slippers and through it out

the door. And there was a bar across from us and the bartender saw this and he came over. And told the guy to let me go and you know pay for his drink, he said I'll give you the money. Pay for your drink and out you get and he was the one who rescued me."

Ashrafali: "We settled in ok"

Altaf: "As a family everything was ok"

Ashrafali: "my father is an amazing person. His values were absolutely amazing"

Shamim: "Not only was he a hard worker, he was very progressive in his thinking, he was very generous, he was very uhm,"

Ashrafali: "He was a great man"

Shamim: "Yeah he was a kind person. He didn't speak much"

Farida: "He was a very quiet person"

Shamim: "You know, like steel waters run deep but when he was younger he had a really bad temper. When he was younger, he had a bad temper. He never said much but when he said something everybody listened. All of his older brothers all of his cousins, they all said that they were afraid of him"

Altaf: "He was what the second youngest? All the older brothers, he was the most aggressive of his whole family"

Shamim: "The most progressive, the most adventurous. He used to play for the Indian volleyball team. Like he was very sportsminded. Back in India he would do kite flying, and he would cut

everybody elses' kites. He was a very fun loving and adventurous person. Even in Uganda he used to love going to the club to play cards, gamble a little bit. Every evening he would go to the club with his friends and play cards. He was not religious at all”

Altaf: “Mom was more religious”

Shirinkanu: Gujarati

Shamim: “He used to go to his club to play cards and stuff. He was a very quiet person but when he said something. Ok, you better listen, if you did not listen and if he had to raise his voice, oh boy. His word was law”

Ashrafali: “And on top of it he was only five foot three.

Shamim: “Five foot six, yeah. But he would, people listened. All my cousins, they still say they were afraid of him to this day. From all his, you know how in India, in India culture, the oldest brother people listen to but everyone used to listen to my dad. You know, he was the one who ran things and everyone listened to him”.

Shirinkanu: Gujarati

Shamim: “She's saying that when he went to Mozambique he went all by himself. So my dad, understood English”

Shirinkanu: Gujarati

Shamim: “My dad did a lot for his family, his brothers. My dad understood English. His English was ok”

Ashrafali: "He wasn't educated"

Shamim: "He had up to grade three education but that was in Gujarati. He never had formal English education, he just picked it up"

Shirinkanu: Gujarati

Shamim: "Just grade one, I thought it was grade three."

Shirinkanu: Gujarati

Altaf: "Grade one"

Shamim: "And his friends, even back home, he had very rich friends. Very progressive friends. He didn't believe in just having Ismaili friends. Most of his friends were actually Hindu and all the other different kinds, different communities and they were quite wealthy. So he picked up English and progressive ideas from there. His friends circle was very wide and varied. So when he came here he did understand English and he could speak. He could read and write, he read all the leases and everything like that but he just had the street smarts and he had business sense. Street smarts he picked it up from the streets. A really good business sense, he had an incredible business ethic, and good business sense. So he didn't have much issue. My mother did not. My mother had a little bit of trouble because she doesn't speak English. She tried"

Shirinkanu: Gujarati

Shamim: "She knows Gujarati, she reads and write Gujarati. So she did, when she came here she did go to a few English classes but she was in her fifties, right so. She has a hard time even know, she has a hard time speaking. She now understands most of it"

Farida: "Because you know the grandkids talk in English to her. Even my daughter she doesn't speak Gujarati."

Shamim: "Everyone speaks to her in English. She can't speak back because she has a hard time communicating"

Farida: "Even when she's talking to you, she'll use a lot of English words but now and again she'll go into Swahili or into Gujarati, yeah"

Shamim: "So she had a little bit of a harder time in that sense, assimilating right? But I don't think she really lacked friends because we have the mosque and she was busy the first 9 years, she was too busy"

Altaf: "You have regular customers coming in so you get to know them"

Shamim: "So she was busy in the store for the first nine years and in the evening she'd go to the mosque and stuff. And even after they closed the store, my dad wouldn't go to the mosque. He'd hardly, one a year if we were lucky, he would go to the mosque. But my mother goes everyday today. Until today, she goes to the mosque not too far from here. The bus comes here.

Shezan: "I guess the last question would be how was, now that you guys have settled, how was raising your own families in Canada and the UK, how was that? Because that was first generation Canadians"

Shamim: "We talk about that all the time."

Farida: "It wasn't hard. It was actually very easy, you know. I don't know for me, you know, Shiraz and I, we raised both of our girls here, they were both born here. He used to be a great

help because he used to help all the time. My girls did all kinds of sports like every week, skating, figure skating”

Ashrafali: “Yeah, yeah you've got two amazing kids”

Laughter

Farida: “And you do too”

Altaf: “I think all of us, the whole family, when you look at all of our kids, they've all done really done well”

Shamim: “They're all very well established, I should say accomplished. All accomplished in their own ways”

Farida: “As for all of us, our first criteria was education”

Altaf: “And that followed from my dad, down.”

Farida: “Follow education to the light”

Altaf: “They're also all athletically inclined. So we really integrated them into the Canadian culture. Your kids are, I think, the most religious. Since Shiraz went to khane the most. All of us have lost a little bit of that culture because my kids don't go to khane, maybe once every five years.”

Farida: “They're all Ismailis”

Altaf: “Yeah they are”

Ashrafali: "My two kids are Christian"

Farida: "The whole rest of the people, that married outside of the culture"

Shamim: "The thing is like, I'm talking about myself and my own kids now, right. I'm not talking about anybody else's kids, I'm talking about my own kids. Because I'm married to a Canadian, and a French-Canadian, I feel my kids have lost a lot of their own heritage. They don't know our language at all, they don't go to khane, they don't, they're not religious. And that's fine but I feel the loss, right, I feel the loss"

Altaf: "I think me, even when I look back on it, 30-40 years ago. I could've done things differently and I appreciate what my parents were doing, I appreciate what my mom was doing, taking us, and forcing us. Until I was twelve, we had to go to khane but once we came here to Canada it was optional. My mom went all the time. It was optional so I stopped going. And so, to me I didn't care, I was brought up well. My kids are really good, all our kids are really good but now when I look at it we have lost the indian culture."

Farida: "Even though we were the most religious, if you want to say that, Shiraz and I, in that family. We still feel the loss because you know Sara is married to an Ismaili and he's more religious so she started going back to mosque but when she was younger she was not forced to go to mosque because we didn't go. And my older daughter who's married to a Canadian, in her I feel the most loss. Because even her, my grandkids are Ismailis, they've also been baptized into the father's religion, so they have a choice. And she doesn't go to khane ever, so her kids will never go to khane, unless I take them to khane. So you know, in every essence"

Altaf: "The kids can do both, when Chantale goes to Mandir they'll go with her, if I go to khane they'll go with me. I go very rarely, once every five years. Funerals and weddings, ha, mostly. I feel that loss too. I feel the loss, and I feel that but there's nothing I can do about it now."

Shamim: "When we came here, I know Altaf, and I, and Ash, and Zul and all of us, we wanted our kids to be integrated in the culture. So we were very focused on that. Integrating them into the Canadian culture. Celebrating Christmas, Christmas trees"

Farida: "Naming our kids, they were very neutral names which you know blended into the culture"

Shamim: "Sharif doesn't feel that at all. He says, mom, why did you give me a Muslim name? Always, til this day. I always tell him, change your name, change your name. You're over 18 change your name. No but mom, you shouldn't have given me a name like Sharif, you know, especially now, since the terrorism stuff and all of this. Well in the last 10, 7-8-10 years. And I always tell him, you're over 18, you can change you name any time you want. I can't change it now. I think he teases me"

Ashrafali: "My kids were totally different. The nearest mosque was 30 miles away so I never had the time when we started off because there was not much time. We had to just work work work. So when the kids were born, there's not mosque around, there's nothing. I don't know any Muslim friends or Indian friends so my two kids are Richards and Ashley"

Shamim: "So you gave them an English name, all the rest of us didn't. Like the grandkids are now getting Western names but our kids, all of our kids have Muslim names, right? Ismaili names, well Anil is neutral. Anil is also an Ismaili name, a Muslim name and Celina is an Ismaili name. They're both neutral names. So all of our kids are, the rest of us are all Ismaili names right so? But we made an effort that they would celebrate Easter and Christmas. But we don't celebrate Eid like we did back home because here nobody does. So all of that has gone by the wayside. And when I say a loss, I don't really mean a loss of the religious part of it as much as just the cultural part, the social part."

Ashrafali: "I haven't done Eid in the last forty years"