

The Ugandan Asian Archive Oral History Project

An Oral History with Shafick Panjwani

Archives and Research Collections

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Abstract:

Shafick was born and raised in Kampala, Uganda. He recalled a pleasant childhood in Uganda while attending the local Aga Khan school. His father owned a local general store and he moved into junior high in a predominantly Ugandan African school.

He remembered the shift that occurred once Idi Amin had effectively seized power. The initial celebrations after Amin's take over quickly turned towards chaos as the army began breaking into homes. With the announcement of the expulsion decree, looting the residences of Ugandan Asians became common place for according to Shafick.

Shafick and his youngest brother were separated from their family during the expulsion due to various passport requirements and were sent to a refugee camp in Vienna. They were eventually reunited with their eldest brother in Vancouver in September of 1973.

Shafick was fifteen when he arrived in Canada. After completing his high school education while working at a cabinet manufacturing company he enrolled at the British Columbia Institute of Technology in appliance services. He started his own business in the 1980s in full service basement renovation and has been working for the past thirty years.

The interview was conducted at Shafick's home in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Shezan: “So this is an oral history being done on June 29th and thank you so much Shafick for taking the time. Yeah, I’ll just start with growing up in Uganda and where you were born.”

Shafick: “Well I was born in Uganda Mengo Hospital, growing up was fun and I went to the Aga Khan school. And it’s funny, now that I’m here you think about things that happened over there, growing up you had servants bringing you lunch for school and things like that. My dad was a merchant, he owned a shop... just a grocery shop with smokes and things like that. He was also a businessman and he owned a couple of houses and things like that. We lived not too far from the main jamatkhana that was there in Kampala on Martin Road, shops around us and a bar across the street, a Hindu temple across the street. So a different variety of people around. So you grew up in all that and you grow up in really warm weather, not too far from the equator so it’s nice. And the rainy seasons – well you call it the rainy seasons, I don’t know how much there was – but growing up life was nice.

I went to the Aga Khan School until I was in grade seven and then we had to go to a higher school... in order to get to high school you had to write an exam and unless you got a certain amount of marks you couldn’t get into a higher school. I was one of those who didn’t get that higher school marks so I had to go to a different school again, an Aga Khan school but a distance away. So you had to walk there, or in the morning you were driven there and at lunch you walked back and whatnot. That was a twenty or twenty five minute walk. I was probably thirteen at the time, twelve, thirteen and then I scored enough marks that I applied to a public school to get into that which was not too far from home. My classes started in the evenings and I was the only – from what I see in the pictures that I remember – I was the only Asian in the whole African school, African class. I made some friends studying and all that.

Well, there was wondering going on with everything going around and as a kid you don’t pay attention to what’s going on. I’m sure my parents did and my father did. But when Idi Amin took over the first few months were celebration and everybody was happy. Then slowly things started getting worse and it was his army that was breaking into houses, stealing stuff. When you’re young you don’t look at what’s happening to the women there, but there were things happening to women as well.

I remember that our house went from just windows being left open to having bars on windows. At night we were living in a prison cell that was created by my parents to keep us in. And every night you heard screams on the street, you heard army vehicles, you heard gunfire, and you were peering outside the windows to try and look at what was going on. You dare not turn any lights on. You see people breaking into your neighbour’s house and there’s nothing you can do. You’re hoping and praying that nothing like that happens to your house. You see in the daytime where people are taken away and they never come back, and one of those incidents happened to my dad where he was taken right in front of us. And you’re looking and everybody is worried because you hear so many different stories about it. One of the nice things is that the store that my dad had, he had a lot of police officers that were his customers who he used to give credit to and he treated them well and they treated him with a lot of respect.

Because I used to work with my dad on and off from the store, I got to know a few of these people. So when he was taken away I took off and went to one of the police stations and I found one of the sergeants that used to deal with my father, I told him the story of what was going on. What was nice is that he started investigating, but by the same token my dad was being smart... my dad spoke seven

languages, seven African languages. So he could talk to them in any of those languages and what he did was he told them look, he didn't have much money on him now but if he went back to the store he could get more money and he could even get his brother in law, my mom's brother who had a store not too far away to see if he can give us some more money. So they fell for that and they brought him back, this was I'd say about four or five hours later. So when he came to the store and I saw him come back, he sort of told us in Gujarati to go get help while he delayed. So while he was doing that I ran up to the police station and found the sergeant and told him what happened. And because my dad knew all these people, they came and got all of these people. Now I don't know if they were army or just robbers, whatever but that's how my dad got away.

There were also stories that you heard as a child... how much of it is true or not you don't know but you heard about where people were taken away to prisons where they were beheaded, or one prisoner is asked to kill the other prisoner so if you don't kill him, he'll kill you. You either survive, or you kill the person. As a child you hear all these things and it stays with you for a long time. Anyways when he gave notice to the Asians that they had to leave within ninety days, my parents that were Ugandan citizens at the time were allowed to stay, but I was born in Uganda and not allowed to stay, neither were my brothers. They were not Ugandan citizens even though we were born there. Because according to the council or whoever was making the decisions is that we didn't have the proper paperwork. When we were called to go get ID's, my parents got their ID but we were not. So we had no choice, and I was fourteen at the time and my younger brother was thirteen."

Shezan: "And you have just two brothers?"

Shafick: "I have... we are four brothers in total. The youngest one had his ID because he was born... he was quite young so he was with our parents. My oldest brother had his own family and he was accepted to come to Canada, so he scored enough and his whole family was able to come to Canada. The problem was this, we couldn't stay there and we couldn't leave because we had no travel documents. My brother and myself we were asked to leave because we were thirteen and fourteen, but we had no travel documents. My parents had their passports and everything else, they could leave or they could stay. So my dad decided at the time that he was going to go to Pakistan. My sister had been living in England for a long time so at the time I talked my parents into sending us to England. However, we couldn't get to England because we... again, no travel documents.

I remember going and standing in line at the British embassy, the immigration thing overnight. I remember standing in line and my parents were worried about it, but I said there are a lot of people in line and I'll be fine, there's a lot of people there. And I remember standing in line, going there at six o'clock the evening before and getting in line, so the office would open the next morning at eight o'clock or whatever so you could get in there and see if you could get something. I have no idea how this happened or why it happened but I got to talk to one of the officers there and I had my parents... some kind of documentation that showed that they were British subjects. My dad had come in from India, brought in by the British. So he had some kind of documentation and I showed it to the girl and I talked to her and told her what was going on. Whether they took pity on us or whatnot but they issued us a passport, my brother and myself a British subject passport. However, we couldn't go into England

because there were two different kinds of passports, one that allowed you to go into Britain, the other one was just a documentation showing that you were a British subject.

So I have this document with me and I'm telling my parents, "Why don't we do this? There's a refugee camp now, why don't we try and go to Austria or somewhere where they were taking refugees and then try and get into England from there, be close by. Of course parents being what they are were not going to let their thirteen and fourteen year old go by themselves and my parents could not go to Austria or wherever the refugee camps... they were thinking of going to Pakistan. They had already made arrangements, my dad was from that area, he was from Bombay originally but he wanted to go back to those roots. My brother and myself were talking my parents saying, "What are we going to be doing there?" It's not something we want to do, I don't think we should be going there. And with the help of my uncle, my mom's brother, he talked them into letting us go to Austria. He said things will be okay, we'll be looked after, not to worry. And chances are we'll be able to get into England from Austria being underage.

Now the other thing that was happening is people were going to the airport and being searched, things being taken away from them. And if you were caught with two documents you were held and tortured or whatever... there were stories going around. So as thirteen and fourteen year olds you're scared and we had two documents, one was the British subject passport and the other one was a travel document from the United Nations taking us into Austria. How or why they let a thirteen and fourteen year old into there, I don't know. I don't remember why we got it or how I got it, I just know that somewhere along the line I did get it. I filled out the forms online and did whatever I had to do. Going to school was out of the... nobody went to school in those days. It was chaos, money meant nothing. All the money that my parents had... we spent as much as we wanted because they couldn't take it with us.

So I remember thinking of going to the airport and it was four o'clock in the morning and my parents couldn't drive us to the airport because of all the roadblocks and everything that was going on. I remember going on a bus, I don't remember how we got to the airport but I remember going on a bus and we made it to the airport but the plane that was supposed to take us was delayed. And we went to the airport, we were so... we were going to be strip searched, there were other people going to this refugee camp and there was this older guy probably in his twenties and we made friends with him. We were talking to him and he said, "If you have two different documentation, destroy one." So we had no choice but to destroy our British passports. But we had made copies that my parents or somebody had. Okay so we had to destroy that, we had no choice thinking that if they find this, we're screwed. So we were there at the airport at about five o'clock or six o'clock in the morning. The flight that was supposed to leave at noon or nine o'clock didn't show up. We're stuck at the airport... and remember we're only thirteen and fourteen, we're scared, we had very little money, we had all these people who were in a panic state. So we're panicking and we're trying to get call of our parents. And my parents were dying because they didn't know if we'd made it there or not, and I'm sure now that I have kids... my children at thirteen or fourteen you would be in a panic state, especially my mom would be in a panic state.

We did finally get a hold of them and my dad managed to come to the airport, so after seeing them we calmed down a bit. We had to leave and they had to stay at the airport and I think our flight didn't show up until nine or ten from what I remember, nine or ten or eleven o'clock at night. So we finally get on

this airplane and we're going to Austria... never heard of Austria before in my life, didn't even know where it was. It was November if I'm not mistaken... I'm trying to remember if it was November or January... I think it was November, December. We go into Austria and I'm wearing dress shoes, I'm wearing a suit, I have one small suitcase with clothes that you would have in a tropical country. My brother is dressed the same way and we learned in Austria where it was winter. There was a bus waiting for us and at that time you didn't go into terminals, you descended onto the tarmac and then you walked into the building and then from there you went through the lineup and did all your papers... I don't remember any of that part for some reason.

I remember going to the refugee camp... Christian, I don't remember, in Vienna. And it was an old army barrack where if you were with a family you had your own quarters, had your own room. But if you're single there was a huge room with bunk beds and this is where you slept, you had your suitcase. But anyways we're going through this lineup and you know they're going through your information and all that, asking where your parents are, right? And you're like wide-eyed, you don't know where your parents are and you can't tell them that you don't know where they are at the time. In Uganda somewhere, we knew they were going to Pakistan but we didn't want to say that because they might send us to Pakistan where we didn't want to go. We told them that we wanted to go to England and my sister was living there, we knew how to get a hold of her.

So anyways the first day that they gave you jackets and a hat, mittens or whatever and then you went into this room and you were in this room with I'd say a hundred other people and just the two of you looking around thinking, what are we to do now? What do you do now? You don't know anybody, nobody knows you, you're thirteen, fourteen year old kids. I remember that first night you're laying down and you're sleeping but you're not actually sleeping because you're worried if someone is going to come and do something or they're going to get into your suitcase and take whatever. There wasn't much in there to take anyways. I remember one of my uncles had given me a guitar and for some reason I took it with me, I have no idea why but in the back of my mind, in the back of my parents mind was if nothing else I might be able to sell this instrument and get some money for it, right? But at the same time we were... we made a friend who was a lot older in their twenties, the person I said we met at the airport. So he was sort of like a big brother who was keeping an eye on us. Again, he was single as well so he would sort of keep an eye on us to make sure we were okay, talk to us. In line if there was a problem he would talk to the officials and stuff like that. So we felt some security.

And there were others... because there were a lot of Ismailis there they took you under their wing because you being an Ismaili and the community the way it is you take the others in, right? So it was nice, in order to get food and whatnot you had to stand in line, something you're not used to. The other thing was the food was different, right? I remember the next day it started snowing and we'd never seen snow so you'd see us out in a suit in our dress pants and clothes at six or seven in the morning outside in the snow being silly. But for the food you were lining up and you're eating this rye bread that's really dark German rye bread that you're looking at and going, this doesn't look like bread, it tastes funny, the food tastes funny and you're hoping none of this is pork because you don't eat pork. God knows, and you're hungry because you haven't eaten in a while, one day became the next day and the next day. And

you got used to that lifestyle because you were young, you adapted fast, they gave you documents that you could go out on the town and come back and you'd show the document and they'd let you back in.

There wasn't much you could do in town, they had a little money that they gave you, so you could go buy some goodies and whatnot but other than that you walked around but you didn't understand the language, it was all German, right? I'd say we lived like that for a good four to five weeks and because this was sort of a refugee camp for not only Ugandans but other Europeans... anyways so they had to... they were moving us out of there. People that you got to know, we made friends with, we were now being shipped out. You didn't know where you were going but to a different refugee camp somewhere and you didn't want to leave because you knew all these people but you had no choice in the matter.

So again we were leaving what we thought was a home to us and we were shipped up north to the mountains to a place called batcrowitezen and we were shipped there with a lot of other Asians and it's a good six or eight hour bus ride from Vienna going up the mountain and all that, beautiful scenery. You're looking out at the scenery and all that and we go there and it's a little hotel kind of thing, chalet that they were putting us in which was nice. You had your own room, my brother and myself had a room by ourselves, there were other Ismailis and other people there and they had already been there prior to us going there so they sort of... they knew the town, they knew the area so it was nice because you got to meet them, they welcomed you in but even then there was static in that community as well because now you have new people coming in here who you felt that distance.

But I think after being there for a day or two we kind of blended in, we were afraid of what was going to happen kind of thing and living up there you go to know a lot of people because it was a small town, there wasn't much to do there so when I came we went walking, you could go anywhere in town. There were no jobs that you could do and at thirteen, fourteen no one was going to hire you, right? You couldn't go to school because it was German, so you had a lot of time on your hands to do absolutely nothing. So we walked around and got into trouble, being preteens I'm sure there was some kind of mischief we got into, right? We got to know some girls there, talked to them and a lot of the local boys were jealous you were talking to them. Girls like you because you were interesting, you were different, right? You were talking to them and the boys hated you so there was always some fight or conflict going on. The food again, a problem with the food, we were not used to this kind of food and the place that we were staying, a lot of German people ate a lot of pork and stuff like that. So again you're very apprehensive about what you're eating.

The winter turned into summer and I got a job there, there was a factory which was canning pickles. And I got a job there so they hired me, they hired a whole bunch of Asians to do work there. It was nice because I made money, not tons of money but I used to do things in the pickle factory, canning and all that. It was in a town a little ways away so every morning we took the bus there and in the evening we came back, or they had a truck that you could ride in. Now remember this is 1972, no seatbelts, no nothing, just the big lorry of the truck and everybody would pile up in the back and you were gone. So that went on for two or three months or something like that and we made friends, made a lot of friends with girls, we had a party there and stuff like that.

And the other thing that was happening was that resentment was growing between the townspeople and us. It's not that they were creating resentment, it's just that their way of life was different. They were feeling threatened because the jobs that were going to their kids were taken away, I'm sure that the wages we were making were not much, they were less than minimum wage they were paying us... or less than they would pay the local people, right? So the resentment was there for that. The churches over there were... they were basically preaching to the girls, the women not to mingle with the boys in our society kind of thing. Not too many of them listened, thankfully. Being kids you know, kids don't listen.

But in the meantime we had a refugee specialist, a British refugee specialist that had come who was interviewing everybody or the United Nations was trying to place everyone into different... where are you going to go now kind of thing. So some people were going to go to Canada, some were going to the Netherlands, some were going to England, some were going to Australia. I forget where else... Belgium I believe there were some. But they were trying to place and when it came turn for my brother and myself for these interviews, even though we knew where our parents were because we had contacted my sister and we used to write to her all the time so we had mail going back and forth so she knew where we were and we knew where she was, she knew my brother was in Canada because she was the only one that hadn't moved. Everybody had her address so all the information was coming to her and then going out from her. So you had one central person that knew where everybody was, which was nice, right?

But being fourteen and fifteen by this time we couldn't tell the authorities where our parents were so we made up a story. So being teenagers you make up this story thinking yeah okay, everything is going to be fine, nor realizing that what you set in motion is going to be much bigger than what you planned on doing. So this commissioner or whoever he was came and interviewed us together and we said, "Look, there was chaos going on, we got separated from our parents and we don't know where they are. Whether they left Uganda, they were killed in Uganda, or they went to some other country, we have no idea where they are." And, "Where would you like to go?" "We'd like to go to Britain, we had these documents that said that we were British subjects." "Give me the proof." We have no proof to show them that we are British subjects, we had to destroy it. "Well, you couldn't have got it." "Yes we did."

So this argument went on but anyways, we wanted to find out about the family and everything else. "Any other relatives?" "Yes, in Canada." "Where?" "We have no idea." We didn't know where my brother was at the time, no idea. So the next time they interviewed me the second time around they separated my brother and myself to interview us separately. I don't know how or why, to this day I have no idea. But our story stuck, they couldn't break it. My brother said the same thing, I said the same thing. No idea where our parents are. What we had in fact done by saying that, it had created a panic in some ways for these authorities. "We have two Ismaili kids who are fourteen and fifteen that have been separated from their parents and they have no idea where their parents are. These are their names, if you have any information about this case let us know so we can find their parents."

This went global. It went to a lot of jamatkhana's in Canada, in England. Now my sister is married to a Hindu so she never went to jamat, so she never heard any of this. My brother was living in Canada didn't go... there weren't regular jamatkhana's in Vancouver. So even if there was an announcement, nobody

heard it, right? And by a miracle I think, nobody thought or nobody knew even though this thing went global. We did find out from my sister that my brother was in Vancouver so the next time we got interviewed. "Where is your brother?" "In Canada." "Where in Canada?" "Vancouver." Why they did not contact my brother or my sister to find out where my parents were to this day I have no idea. For some reason I did not. Because I had a feeling if they knew where my parents were, fourteen and fifteen we would have been shipped straight there. Underage, shipped straight there.

So all these interviews, all these things going on. In Austria we're working, my brother couldn't work because he was younger. For some reason it became like an adventure, when you're younger it's an adventure, you're not worried about it. I'm sure my parents were terrified of what was going on with their kids.

Fast forwarding to November of 1973... no, it couldn't have been November. September of 1973 we finally get travel visas to come to Canada, to Vancouver. We had applied, my brother from there applied to sponsor us from Vancouver to sponsor us from Austria. So he knew where we were, he had told everybody where his brother was. Now because my sister was married and Britain wasn't taking any more people we had to rely on my brother, so now he is sponsoring us to come to Canada.

When you get your documents you only have a week or two before you get to leave. You don't have time to do whatever, but before... I'm actually jumping ahead on this. When we were in batcrowtzen after we were there I'd say 'til June, somewhere around June they couldn't keep us anymore there so we were shipped back to another place outside of Vienna, I can't remember. But in the meantime we had become, when I was working at the factory we'd become really close to another family there. So the mother from that family had taken us on as little kids. So I remember being torn away from there to come here there was a lot of... not resentment but it was like being torn away from your family again. It was very emotional, there was a lot of crying going on and all that.

So anyways we were taken away from there to go up to this place that's closer to Vienna and this lady, she knew where we were going so she came and visited us once. This particular place was called underground caves or whatever it is, so we went to these underground caves. I seem to remember these underground caves... you could take a tour and they had boats that you would go into the water in and they had those rope formations that are... I forget what they're called. So you get to see all that and she took us on a tour of that, she spent the day with us before she went back. It was nice of her.

Anyways, we were there until September of 1973 before we got our visas to come to Canada, we couldn't notify by brother that we were coming. The only way we could do it was to write a letter or a postcard, we put a postcard in the mail hoping that it would get there in time for him to meet us. But we didn't know where we were going, got visas to Canada and my brother is in Vancouver and we were hoping that we were going straight to Vancouver. Well we left Austria and we landed in Montreal, I think that was the receiving for everybody. So we stayed in a hotel in Montreal for one night, they did all the paperwork and whatnot, then they put us on a train, Montreal to Vancouver, I think it's a three day journey.

Along the way there were a lot of other Asians who were on the same train that got off in different parts of Canada along the way. And I remember that there was no sleeping thing on the train, it was called a day and nighter. So you just sat in the seat which reclined a little bit but that's where you stayed for three days. Okay and the food... you had a little bit of money and the food was very expensive on the train, so you basically bought some stuff when you got on the train and when it stopped you got up and stretched your legs, picked something up and got back on the train.

So I remember coming to Vancouver... I think it was a weekend that we came, Saturday or a Sunday, something like that. We're at the train station, it was downtown where the Waterfront Station is right now, that was the original train station. We're standing there and we're looking around and there is nobody there to meet us, nobody there to pick us up. Now the people that paid for our airfare was a Christian society in Vancouver that had paid for our airfare to come here and they had sent the rep out and they were asking us where we're going, who we are going with, all that stuff. We said, "My brother is supposed to be here, we don't know his address. We have a phone number so we can try calling him." He said, "Sure, try the phone." So he gave us quarters to try and we're calling but there's no answer, there's no answer, there's no answer. Great, so he took us and put us at English Bay near Stanley Park.

They took us and they put us in a hotel there, but this hotel I remember was not a very good hotel. There were a lot of prostitutes and stuff but my brother and I didn't know any different. We were right on the beach in this hotel room and we tried to get a hold of my brother. There's no answer, there's no answer, and I think it was a Sunday if I'm not mistaken. Finally at about eight o'clock or nine o'clock in the evening, we hadn't eaten all day because we didn't have money to buy anything, we don't know where anything was except for some chocolate bars or something like that that we picked up from the lobby. We get a hold of my brother at eight or nine o'clock at night and he goes, "Where are you?" I said, "Vancouver." "Where in Vancouver?"

Now you've got to remember he doesn't know we're coming, he's living in a one bedroom apartment with his family, or a two bedroom with his family. Now he has two brothers in town, where is he going to put us? So we're downtown at eight o'clock at night and what had basically happened was the hotel that we were staying in, the beach that was across the street? He was there the whole day. We called him up and he says, "We just came from there." He asked us where we were and we sort of described the area. He said, "We were across the street at the beach, we just came from there." So he said, "Stay there, I'm coming to see you. Do you need anything?" I said, "Yeah we haven't eaten all day." So he said, "Okay don't worry, we'll bring you something to eat."

So he comes there with his wife, my niece and nephew were quite young at the time. I think they... he left them with my cousin and my brother and his wife came downtown to the hotel. We haven't seen each other in two years, right? We're a little bit bigger and all that, hugs and kisses and all that. He said, "Why didn't you let us know?" I said, "Yeah we did, we sent you a postcard and everything else." He said, "I had no notice of you guys coming, I can't take you home with me right now because I have nowhere to put you." I remember saying, "Come on, let's have something to eat." First meal in Canada? McDonalds, downtown. [Laughter]

Anyways we're in this hotel and we talked for a long time and the poor guy had to make arrangements to get an extra bed or whatever, a hide a bed so we could sleep in the living room. My cousin, he used to live in a house so we stayed with him for a couple of days. But he picked us up the next day, we were only in the hotel for one day which was nice. But you know it was an experience because for him it was a very big shock, for us even though it was an adventure it was a total shock because now we're in a totally different country, different society, a different culture.

School had already started so we can't go to school because we can't be registered for school. All we have are these documents from the Canadian government telling us that we're landed immigrants, right? So I don't remember the first week with them, we probably watched TV and didn't do much, around the house and stayed around that area. He used to live in Richmond so that's where we went. We used to live right next to the mall, there was an apartment building right behind the mall. So we lived there and we sort of got to know the area, walked around and all that. For a month, a month and a half there really wasn't much we could do. Help around the house, play with my niece and nephew and all that.

But we started school in January of '74, January or February of '74 when the school started after Christmas break. They put me in grade ten."

Shezan: "You were fifteen I guess at the time?"

Shafick: "Fifteen at the time. So they put me in grade ten and going to school... first of all the clothes that I had were different, things that you probably wouldn't wear. There was a whole bunch of racism at school as well because a whole bunch of people came in '72, '73. So there was racism in school because you didn't really mingle with too many people. I knew one other kid who lived in the same complex that came from Uganda and I got to know him. I knew him from back home, and one of my friends that's here now that was how I got to know him. Other than that I didn't get to know too many people.

And I remember going to school and learning what they were teaching and I'm thinking, this is pretty easy. Even though I had missed almost a whole year of school, in Uganda the subjects that you were taking and what they were teaching here... we were two years ahead of what they were teaching here almost. There were a couple of things... like social studies was different, geography was part of social studies, the math we knew, but they put you in power mechanics even though you don't know anything about mechanics. I told them I wanted to do electrical but they said, "No, no, you have to do power mechanics." It was grade ten.

Summer... going to school every day like that, when summer break came in grade ten I found a job. I was working downtown selling ice cream, on the bicycles. It was called Dickie Dee... you know one of those things in front and you bike around town selling ice cream to people. It was by commission so you didn't make any money if you didn't buy anything and you got ten cents, fifteen cents per ice cream that you sold. At that time ice cream sold for a dollar, dollar fifty or whatever it was. So you loaded up and you biked all over Vancouver to sell this ice cream and when you ran out you came back and got more and you went back again. On a good day you made thirty dollars, on a bad day you make ten bucks I think.

But it was a job and when summer finished and school started again I got another job in construction, a company that was owned by an Ismaili. And I started working for them so I never went back to school. I started working with them doing different jobs, getting paid minimum wage at the time. My brother was working and my sister in law was working, but supporting six people and we're trying to get my parents... by this time we knew where they were. We knew where they were the whole time and they knew where we were so we tried to sponsor them to come, and the more income there is the better it looks for you. So I didn't go back to school, I just started working for this company doing construction work for minimum wage, and my whole paycheck would go to my brother so that he could run the household or whatever.

I did that for the longest time... 1979 the company was in hardship so they weren't getting enough jobs and I wasn't getting paid regularly. So I quit and started working for a gas station, the graveyard shift so I worked the night shift all the time. I'm trying to think which came first, the construction or the gas station... other way around, gas station then construction. I used to work at the gas station and go to school in the daytime and then left school and worked full time at the gas station at night. And then the construction, and then I got a job at a cabinet manufacturing company. So I started working there and while I was doing that I met my wife and I started going to school at BCIT [British Columbia Institute of Technology] and I took appliance services, learning how to fix appliances. Because I had a knack for that even though I was working at the gas station. A lot of friends had problems at home with machines and things breaking down and household items, I used to fix them all the time for free, right? So I learned how to do a lot of electrical stuff and I just had a knack for it and I got into it. So I took appliance servicing in school which is a ten month course and then the recession hit."

Shezan: "That was in the early 1980's right? Yeah, okay."

Shafick: "No jobs, couldn't get into that field so I was living with my parents and then Jane got an apartment in Richmond, so we moved in together. The place where we were living, an apartment building they were looking for a maintenance person, so I started working for them. I used to do painting and maintenance and a cousin of mine owned a painting company so I started working with them and doing all of that. Then I started my own business doing painting, construction, renovating basements. It was with my cousin that we started the business together and he moved to Toronto. The company I work for now, I started working for them and I've been with them for almost thirty years."

Shezan: "Thirty years? Wow, that's a long time."

Shafick: "That's the story. Long and boring." [Laughter]

Shezan: "No that was so interesting! It was fascinating. So then your younger brother, did he stay in school while you were working?"

Shafick: "He stayed in, he finished grade twelve in school. He stayed in school... he now lives in Victoria and he owns Maximum Express which is a courier company going around town delivering things. He owns a furniture store and he is one of the Victoria Island Chamber of Commerce Vice President. He was also on the CHEK TV's... you know Dragon's Den? Same concept but for the island, he's one of the people on that. So he's done really well for himself."

Shezan: "And then your older brother that you were staying with, how much older was he?"

Shafick: "He is quite a bit older than me. He is now seventy and I'm fifty six."

Shezan: "Fourteen years. And he was working, what was he doing?"

Shafick: "He was working... when I came here he was working for a parts store. Electronics or something like that, because when we were in Uganda he used to work for Phillips Electronics. So when he came here he got into the same kind of field. It was more for sales and shipping and receiving, stuff like that in the evenings. He used to clean offices and we used to go out... just to make ends meet and things like that. So he used to do that and he also worked for the school board in the evening as a custodian. So he was busy working two jobs trying to make ends meet and stuff like that. Now he... he worked for Davis Controls which is electronic stuff and then he started working for... see these houses that are right here? So he was working for a company that sold these things, collectables, plates and all that. But the market for collectables has gone under so he retired from that. And his daughter is grown up and married and they're home. Vending machine company... where they have different vending machines in places and he works with them. So he is semi-retired, he only works one or two days a week and he goes and helps out over there."

Shezan: "And you were saying... so your dad was born in Bombay and your mom was born..."

Shafick: "No, she was born in Tanzania."

Shezan: "In Tanzania, interesting. So I guess they've been in East Africa longer than your dad's family."

Shafick: "So they moved from Tanzania to Uganda and my dad met her there. So I think it was an arranged marriage. So he came there with his brother and I don't know what his brother was doing but he became a merchant right away, he worked his way through whatever and he opened a shop and was a merchant. Then he met my mother and they got married. They had my sister and my older brother within a year of each other, and then there was a break of thirteen years and then I was born, then I have two others younger than me. So one in Victoria, my youngest one is in Calgary who works for Calgary Lighting as the sales manager there, who has done quite well for himself as well."

Shezan: "So your shop in Uganda, was it a shop in front and then a house behind?"

Shafick: "No the shop... we were on a hill so the shop was on the bottom and the house was on top."

Shezan: "And I guess it was one of those... because it was on a hill you could still enter the house from the street?"

Shafick: "Yes. So you could enter the house from the top of the street and the house was on the bottom and you entered that from the street as well. I tried looking up on Google Maps to see if this actually is still around, but that's forty years ago, right? So much has changed now there and I've never been back."

Shezan: "You've never been back?"

Shafick: "No, if I had the money and I had the means I would love to take my kids there."

[Interruption]

Shezan: “So did your parents end up in Pakistan?”

Shafick: “They did go to Pakistan from the time that we were in Austria and then we came to Canada and five years later is when we could sponsor them to come to Canada and we all lived here together. Once I knew that my parents were coming my younger brother and myself got an apartment and my parents came and lived with us in the apartment. Then I moved in with Jane afterwards and we got married.”

Shezan: “And then did your parents start working again when they were here?”

Shafick: “No, they were older and the culture was different. But my dad was very entrepreneurial, what they did was... they used to do catering for the home. So a lot of Ismailis want their roti, stuff for khane and all that stuff. So they used to cook at home and people would order food from them. My mom was a superb cook, an amazing cook so she used to make all kinds of wonderful stuff. It’s... after she passed away I haven’t eaten a lot of the sweets because you’re always comparing it to hers. It’s not the same and the taste isn’t there so I just... so I don’t eat too much of the Indian sweets anymore. So I guess that’s a good thing. [Laughter] One thing Jane regrets is not sitting down and getting mom’s recipes, all her recipes were in her head so when she was cooking someone had to actually write down what she was putting in, right? While she was doing it.

And my dad spoke some English and Jane and my dad were very close, extremely close. She used to... any time he had insurance things... one thing that happened was when they were here my dad had stocks or whatever in Uganda with IPS, and the houses that we had... I think the Ugandan government did some kind of settlement so he got some of the money from that. My sister in England got some money from that because my dad had houses but one of the houses was in my sister and my brother’s name. So they got the money and my parents got the money from that. It wasn’t much, whatever it was. But all the correspondence and stuff Jane used to do for him. He used to speak English, but my mom very little.”

Shezan: “I guess my last question is kind of the toughest one, today how would you identify yourself? Would you say a Canadian of Ugandan origin? A Canadian Ugandan? There’s no right or wrong answer.”

Shafick: “No, I will... when people ask me I say I’m Canadian. I’ve lived in Canada longer than I’ve been anywhere else, right? So I’m Canadian.”

Shezan: “So what does that mean to be a Canadian?”

Shafick: “Well Canada has become our home, right? The security of home, my family is here. I raised my family here, I bought a house here. I’ve done quite well for myself and all because I was given an opportunity to do things here. So for me, Canada is home. So like any other Canadian you ask that, I’m a Canadian first and everything else second. I grew up in Uganda, I was born there, I came from there, so there is a warm spot in my heart for Uganda, but I’m a Canadian. That’s how I describe myself... into hockey [laughter], other cultures. Yeah, it’s been an interesting life.

But I think that sometimes even... over forty years have gone by... some of the things that worried you when you were younger, things that happened when you were younger still stay with you. Even now if there's a loud noise outside my heart will go racing a hundred miles an hour, and this is all because of what happened when I was younger. Because you knew when you went to bed at night you didn't know if you were going to wake up the next morning and you heard that there were things going on in the middle of the night that woke you up, and you were looking out the window to see what was going on. Your parents would be telling you not to look out the window because someone could be killed, things like that. You're seeing people being taken away, so that feeling even after forty years is still with you.

And for the longest time when Jane and I used to travel by car across Canada – which is quite safe – I could not bring myself to stay in a low class motel. It had to be where it was lit quite well, if I drove into a place that was dark and dingy or didn't look right... I didn't mind, I would drive all night not to stay there. Now it's a little different, I'm used to it so I'm okay. It stays with you, it doesn't go away. It's hard to explain to people what it feels like. You watch these movies and you know they're movies and everything else... they don't disturb you as much but as you're getting older they do disturb you a little bit, the feelings come back. And as I was telling you watching *The Last King of Scotland*... even though the really bad parts were not in there, there were things that they were talking about doing that brought back so many other memories it just... the feelings flooded you. Not so much the memories but the feelings... that you couldn't sit through the whole movie, you had to turn it off and walk away, do different things. Watch it the next day... I'd watch it in sections.”

Shezan: “It was a lived experience for you.”

Shafick: “Yes, so it's... when you sit down with the children and you try to explain what it is like, what the atmosphere was like, what the curfews were like. There were curfews and by nine o'clock everything... by nine o'clock nobody is out on the street, everything is closed and everybody is inside their house. Going for prayers and everything is shut down. So you know that it's going to be hard, even though you're a kid, and kids as teenagers or preteens, you're going to fool around and play because you get this feeling from your parents, you see them that they're apprehensive, they're worried so you start worrying and become apprehensive. You don't lose that. How do you explain that to them?”

Shezan: “Someone else was explaining to me in an interview that she had a hard time watching *The Last King of Scotland*. She told me that it brought back the anger that she has for Idi Amin, that's the guy that kicked us out and took me and my family...”

Shafick: “To tell you the truth I don't know if I have the anger for it. What I do have is the feeling first of all that upsets you, because it took away your childhood, it took that away. He took away five years that I could have had with my parents. Because when they came here I was a lot older, I was independent. My parents were expecting me to obey what they were saying because when we left we were younger. To listen to them... and I had been on my own for so long. I had been on my own since I was fourteen, even when I moved in with my brother... when we were living in Austria we were on our own. So we were on our own since we were fourteen, we had to grow up. There was not... like these days you have teenagers who live at home and things are given to them, you can go find a job. You didn't have the

luxury of doing that, you had to grow up. There was no choice so your childhood was taken away from you, your teen years were taken away from you.

And that's the part that was upsetting, that was the part that was hurting and you were saying, "What if my life was in Uganda? What would I be doing?" Different in so many different ways, right? The opportunities I might have had over there I couldn't have over here. Like you had to take a low paying job, a low paying this, to survive over here... to grow up. You're lucky that you're able to go as far in your life as I have, but could it have been a little easier or better if I was back there? The what-ifs, there were a lot of what-ifs, you were always questioning that... that's the part that was upsetting.

Looking at him, even today when I was looking at some of the things that was going on it's like... there wasn't the anger, it was like, why did this have to happen? And why is it that even though you're born into a country that you are not a citizen of that country? I still have my birth certificate and my birth certificate shows born in Uganda, Mengo Hospital... but it's not worth the paper it's written on. So that's the part I think was upsetting more than anything else. And you know the feelings come back when your dad's taken away, or the things that happen at night, or the gunfire that you hear at night, the yelling and screaming and the tanks rolling down the street, or the trucks coming by with all these army people in it. You're hoping it's not your house or your neighbour's house. It's very sad to say that, and you're thinking that. And I'm sure everybody else down there is thinking I hope it's not my house but the next house. It's such a sad state to be in, right? I hope it's my neighbour and not me. Who wants to live that life? It's very sad but I think life turned out for the better in some ways."

Shezan: "Yeah, everybody seems to be doing well."

Shafick: "Yes."

Shezan: "And is there anything else that you wanted to add at all?"

Shafick: "No I think we've covered everything I can remember, I mean I'm sure the storyline that I've given you is mixed up in a lot of ways, thinking back what was first and what was second. Its forty years ago and it's hard to remember all that. There's so much of it that's probably forgotten, so much of it is repressed, that hopefully will never come up. Maybe it will someday, who knows."

Shezan: "Well thank you so much. I really appreciate it."

Shafick: "No problem."

[End of transcript].