

## **Shiraz Lalani**

### **Ugandan Asian Oral History Project: Arrival and Early Experiences**

**Shiraz Lalani:** “I came, went to Montreal first, and it’s interesting, I remember my first day because I came to Montreal, thirteenth of October, 1972. There’s something about the thirteenth. I was born on the thirteenth, my first job in Kampala was on the thirteenth, I came to Canada on the thirteenth, my first job in Canada was also on the thirteenth. There was a guy from Toronto, he came to interview me—a newspaper guy from the *Toronto Star*—he wanted to write about Uganda Asians and I told him about this thirteen and he did a write-up. I know I have it somewhere. Thirteen is a lucky number in the life of a Ugandan because thirteen is not a lucky number for most people, you know. So this is what happened.”

Shezan Muhammedi: “And then, so you...”

Shiraz: “When I landed in Montreal, then they were asking me, “Where do you want to go?” It was a refugee camp—it was an army camp actually. They treated us well. We came, they gave us winter clothing—it was just an overnight kind of thing. They processed our application and they gave us some money and then they put me on the plane.”

**Arzina Lalani:** “How much did they give you?”

Shiraz: “Twenty-five dollars. But they gave me the winter—remember that winter coat that I had? I wore it for thirty years actually. It was so warm! I kept it and actually at the end of the thirty years it looked like a refugee coat, but it was so warm and it kept me warm over the years. So it was okay. It was not too cold. That was my first experience and the next day we were in Kitchener. When I landed in Kitchener, there was a, they had formed a—what is it called? A group, a university group. It was called FOUR. F-O-U-R. Friends of Uganda Refugees. This was a local initiative from the University of Waterloo. There was one professor, an Indian professor, and he had initiated this arrangement that anybody who came from Uganda, they would look after you. They would take care of you. You could go into their homes and they decided, look, there’s about five or six professors of Indian origin actually, and they said, “We’re going to help these guys.” So when I came, I landed in Kitchener and as soon as I landed, there was a Manpower guy who came to receive us and he told us about this FOUR and he said, “Your arrangement has already been made. You are going to stay with one of the professors. He has invited you to his house and he is going to take care of you and get you on your feet, basically.” That was amazing! That they would do this.”