

**The Ugandan Asian Archive Oral History Project**

An Oral History with Anonymous I

Archives and Research Collections

Carleton University Library

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An Oral History with Anonymous III  
The Ugandan Asian Archive Oral History Project  
Archives and Research Collections, Carleton University Library

Narrator: Participant  
Researcher: Yasmin B. Jamal  
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***Abstract:***

The participant and their family were expelled from Uganda by President and Military General Idi Amin in the fall of 1972. The participant recalls his experiences during the time of the expulsion period, and his experience arriving in Vancouver and looking for work as a refugee.

This oral history covers the participant's memories from their life in Uganda, the expulsion, and their resettlement in Canada.

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

Participant: "So as I was telling you Yasmin, I have a thirteen year old grandson and one day he was doing his school project and in the project the teacher had asked them to talk about themselves and their families. He was asked, "Are you interested in talking about who your parents are? Who your grandparents are? Were they born here, or in another country? When did they come here?"

He kind of got excited and said, "Well my grandfather talks about it, about their life in Uganda, and having come here many years ago as a refugee." One day he asked me, "Would you mind helping me with my project?" And I said, "Sure, let's sit down."

We sat down and it looked like his project was quite interesting. It also inspired me to go back to my own reflections that I had done a long time ago about coming here to this country 40 years ago. And so with him, the project itself of course was a short one, but it inspired me to put something in writing. I did a little bit of writing and hopefully some of this might come up in the questions that you may have.

Basically when I started – and it's only halfway through, a quarter way through – I talked about the background events that lead to the expulsion. What happened? Why were we expelled? Who were we? How were we even in Africa? The journey itself, how it began, and what the process was before we were accepted to come to Canada. There were all of these stories... there was the special airlift that happened, the accounts of the first taste of life in Canada, when we came to Montreal and what happened there. Then of course we moved to Vancouver, onwards to Vancouver and what happened there, and then the beginning of a new life.

I thought that what I would then do is have a [inaudible] narrative for the next 35, 36 years of life in Canada... but that's not the detail I thought would be of interest. I am working on the other part that I wanted to capture. The thoughts that I went through before I came here today... they will remind me of some things..."

Yasmin: "This project might be a push for you to finish that." [Laughter]

Participant: "For sure. Where do you want me to start?"

Yasmin: "Start off... the outline that you gave me, I think start off by this outline."

Participant: "Well you know, one morning I got up and I was going to work as usual. I would listen to the news in the morning, so I turned on Radio Uganda. We knew that things were not going well in the country, and all of a sudden I heard the announcement that said all Asians in Uganda have to leave within 90 days. When I heard that, I was shocked. Did I hear this right? It didn't make sense. We were in Uganda, we were born there, and our parents were born there. Why was the announcement made by Idi Amin saying we all have to leave? So this started to reflect on our position in the country, whether we were citizens of the country... it was our homeland. All these things started to come alive at that time.

What happened was... we all went to work and saw what was going on. The background is – as many people know already – that in Uganda there were political issues. The country was a democratically elected government led by Milton Obote. When he was out of the country, he went to Singapore on a Commonwealth conference and he had a very strong army who perhaps was not always in line with his thinking and so on. But anyways they were still there. There was this general called Idi Amin who had become quite vocal about how he wanted to make changes to the country. Obote and his regime were already in the process of making many economic and social changes in the country. [Idi Amin] lost his patience, and while Obote was out of the country there was a military coup d'état and he took over the country and said he is now the leader.

People were originally saying okay, maybe things have changed, military dictatorship is not always a nice thing to happen because there is martial law, your rights get taken away and then you don't know what's going to happen. In the beginning as we looked around people were saying, "Okay, we needed change, maybe change will happen." Idi Amin became quite popular with the masses, because the language he spoke was very simple... he said, "I am going to bring a new life to this country," and so on.

Then he kept on saying that one of the reasons why we are having all these problems is that there are too many foreigners who are, as he said, "Milking the economy of the country." He said, "I've worked with them, I've talked to them, but my decision is we have to ask them to leave." We were all listening to this, and there were people – as our background was – their fathers... my grandfather actually had migrated from India. My parents were born in Uganda, I was born in Uganda, and so many of us had become citizens of the country.

Now this president is talking about those things, who is not a citizen of the country and perhaps they are not going to be working toward the benefit of the country. [We thought] what Idi Amin was doing was something that needed to be reviewed and so on. But he was only talking about those who are not citizens of the country. This announcement that I heard on the radio was that everybody has to go. So this came as a real shock, what does he mean? Does he mean that those who have made this their country adopted [land], who were born here for generations? If we have to go, where do we go? Some of these people – foreigners, as they were called – they still maintained their Indian citizenship, or Pakistani citizenship. A large number of people continued to hold British passports because the colonial government at that time had made them British subjects and people didn't renounce them, they continued.

But we were Ugandans, so the issue that we were all faced with... is this guy serious? If he says we have to go, where does he think we will go? This is our country. There was fear, shock, we thought over time things would become clearer but we would soon find out he was adamant. The announcement came on coming on the radio and newspapers and so on, and he said, "Ninety days, time is ticking, if those who do not leave before the deadline, they'll wish they were in hell." Which would be a better place than what Uganda would be... you know, so it was a time of distress and fear, they didn't know what was

going on and we were told there were approximately fifty to seventy thousand people who will be affected, and what is going to happen to them?

There were others who had their citizenship, and they will go perhaps to those countries. Those of us who now became stateless, what is our future? All of a sudden we found out that this was no longer just a local issue, it had become an international issue because this was an expulsion order that Idi Amin had come up with, which really impacted civil rights, human rights. It impacted so many countries, and particularly the United Nations, who realized that if these things really happened there could be as many as fifty to seventy thousand refugees that will become the responsibility of the UN to do something about. So they intervened and tried to convince President Amin that this was not going to be a humane thing to do. "Where do you think these people will go?" But he was adamant.

While all this was happening, internationally I think people came to realize that this is a human disaster in the making and that something had to be done. All of a sudden we were listening to the radio and reading newspapers and so on. We found that some countries came forward with saying, "We are willing to take some refugees to our country." We were sitting there and the going through the whole process of saying, "Who are these countries? How do you apply?"

Everybody had different ways how they managed. My own family, when we started to look around, the country that attracted us was Canada because we had heard quite a bit about them. We thought that would be one country we could apply to, and see if they would take us. At the same time we didn't know much about Canada. It was cold, cold air, very far away from here, and there are no people from our community there in any numbers and so on. But we were young and we decided, let's go.

Every day people started to line up at different embassies. We went to the Canadian embassy and lined up and made an application and so on. Then again the issue was family, you were [applying] - but what about your aging parents, your brothers, your sisters? What is going to happen to them? Do they all come with me? All of this confusion was going on but for the reasons I stated, we decided to go.

We applied to the Canadian embassy and of course they had a points system and we scored okay so they said, "We will let you know." Again, there was anxiety, what if Canada says no? Is there any other country we go to? We lined up at another embassy, and every day we'd go there. Work was going on, every morning from nine to four you had to go to work, and then you had to go back again and stand in the lineup and apply to different embassies and so on.

While we were doing all this, lo and behold, I got the notification that I had been asked for an interview. I went there and to cut a long story short, we were accepted, Canada would take us as refugees. But you had to go through this medical tests and all that. Still the process was not over. Finally word came that yes, you are accepted to immigrate to Canada and a letter came in the mail that we were - my wife and I - put on the first flight that was to leave Entebbe airport to go to Montreal, on an Air Canada flight. Once we had all of these details, we were ready to go. Of course, we didn't know if we should be excited or if we should be worried. We didn't know what was going to happen. Not only about us going to a new

country and all that, but what's going to happen to our family? None of our families had anyone going, but we were kind of fast tracked because of our education and background. I had a master's degree and my wife had a bachelor's degree, she was a teacher. So we thought that we would be able to start a new life, and with the points system we qualified, so we moved.

What about our parents? At the end of the day we left. We thought, something will happen, something will work out. You can't say, "No, I'm not going unless you take my family." It was trying times, so we accepted and then the day came when we had to go to the airport. We were told we had to leave everything behind. Our home, our cars, our personal belongings. You could take one suitcase with just your personal belongings and that's all you were allowed to take. So here we go my wife and I with one suitcase we went over to the Canadian embassy and they put us on a bus to take us to the Entebbe airport which was about forty miles away from Kampala and we left everything behind.

We had fear for our family and their future and we worried about what was going to happen to them, their safety, and our own possessions. Would there be any way to retrieve some of them? There was no way, we had to leave everything behind. Including all of the friends that we had, not only from our community but all of our other friends. People at work who were seeing what was going on and all of that. It was very, very traumatic, a very emotionally difficult time but we took the courage and got on to the flight. The journey from Kampala to Entebbe airport was very scary because when we... there were military checkpoints, and they were checking everyone. We didn't know whether they would let us go or not.

One very important thing that was clear, was that anyone leaving the country had to have tax clearance. Have you paid all your taxes? And for that you had to physically go to the government offices and obtain this tax clearance certificate. That was a nightmare. Up until the last day we didn't know if we were going to go or not and the Canadian embassy told us, "Look, we are ready to take you but if the Ugandan government says you can't go, there's nothing we can do." Our tax clearance certificate... of course you know how things were at that time, all the bureaucracy and the bribes. All these people who were there, they knew we were desperate so they were not going to make it easy for us. They were all looking for something to be given to them.

Anyways, we finally got our tax clearance certificate and got to the airport. On the Air Canada flight I think there was 260 of us on that first flight... somewhere around 250. We were told that we were going to Montreal on a direct flight, a long flight, so be ready! So you know we were there, had a final look at the land of our birth, our home. We were leaving the family behind, and of course everything we owned. We were on board and the journey began, we were off.

That was one phase... and there were of course other experiences that we usually had. But as far as processing the application we were lucky because we scored all the points because of age, education, and health, and all of that was in favour. So point-wise we were okay."

Yasmin: "Were you the eldest in the family?"

Participant: "No, I was in the middle, I had a younger brother and I had an elder brother and you know... sometimes you don't know whether it's just luck that people were brought in very quickly and others they took some time."

Yasmin: "You were very lucky."

Participant: "We were very lucky. We got a new life"

Yasmin: "I like how you mentioned you were not only leaving your possessions, but your family, your friends, things like that. That was a big thing to leave behind."

Participant: "Yeah, you know because our parents were born there... to us, there was no other country that we would call home. Many people severed a lot of ties with the subcontinent, many people had over time moved to the U.K., or somewhere in Europe. No one talked about Canada at that time... but a lot of people went to the U.K. and I believe many people held dual citizenship. If they had Ugandan citizenship they also hung on – smartly – to the other one. In times like this they were saying, "We told you!" These were all technical things that started to haunt us at that time, because what was happening was those who had British subject qualifications, they were supposed to renounce it to get legitimate Ugandan citizenship. We never had it, so we didn't have to renounce, but my father did have British citizenship. So when the time came for him to become a Ugandan citizen, he renounced it.

Now when all this processing started after we left, we found out my father was having lots of problems. What was the problem? They couldn't find the papers that stated he had renounced his British citizenship. So he was not a Ugandan citizen and the Canadian government didn't want to take British subjects, so it became a political nightmare. Even though... legitimately, genuinely, who knows who kept all those papers, right? We didn't have photocopies of all those documents, so my father and mother – particularly at that time – didn't have a way to prove that these were genuinely Ugandan passports. My father said, "I have no citizenship?" And they said, "Our records show you are a British subject so you do not have citizenship." They had to go through this, and how do you get around it? There was no place where you could go and speak to anybody with some rationale. It was a matter of hey, you are either black, or Indian, or white. That was the end of the story.

There were some very difficult issues that arose. I remember one very... an incident just came to mind right now. At the time we were very scared to move around during the evening time and everything had to be done at four o'clock. You had to go home and shut yourself up because there were army people all over the place. Remember Uganda was under martial law, it was military rules and in many places there were curfews going on all the time. In the streets you always saw soldiers with guns moving around. You were always afraid that they would stop you, they would corner you – and they did.

My father was from outside Kampala and one day we were trying to bring him to Kampala, some of his personal belongings and so on. We packed them up, and we decided to just move to Kampala so that we were all in one place. He packed everything up and of course on the way while he was moving... there was an army checkpoint.

They told him to get out of the car, get his things – his personal belongings. So one of the army officers, he started to open up the small boxes of mementos that my father had been getting for years and years. There were diamonds, jewelry, badges, mementos, necklaces and so on. They said, “This is all gold. You can’t take it, you have to leave it behind.” Of course they wanted to grab it, right?

While they were going through they found some bills, some currency notes. These were... I don’t know if you know this but there are many memento currency notes called diamond jubilee. It will say one thousand [inaudible] blessings. So they were this kind of bank note, and my father had kept them as mementos of that time of the jubilee and all that. This guy said, “Look, it is a crime to be in possession of foreign currency.” My father said, “No, this is not currency.” But they couldn’t understand, they said, “This is foreign currency that you are going to take, you are going to jail.” My father was taken away, just on account of that possession. Then of course fortunately, someone came to his rescue and...”

Yasmin: “Was he by himself?”

Participant: “No, my mother and father and the driver. Because my parents used to be living in a place outside of Kampala.”

Yasmin: “What was it called?”

Participant: “It was called [redacted]... a small village where many community members lived, small traders. There were many [inaudible], so they have come here instead of many villages place. Gradually a community started to grow. My parents saw an opportunity to go and start a business there and we also had businesses in three or four different places. My parents decided that they were going to go and live there. So they lived there and it was a very lucrative business, they were doing very well.”

Yasmin: “What kind of business, can you share?”

Participant: “My family was in the food business, we had moved to go to good schools, so we all moved to Kampala. But the distance was not far so they were always commuting. They were coming out of there to Kampala. It was a very, very trying circumstance. We found out that he was in prison and there was no way of getting him out...”

Yasmin: “And you didn’t have cellphones at that time to phone anybody...”

Participant: “Then we didn’t know... our driver was very good about it so he immediately contacted a few people that he thought would be able to talk these people out of it. And you know... how you talk



them out of it is to give them something. I don't know what happened but luck was on our side and these people let my dad go at the expense of confiscating a whole bunch of things.

So you know these things were very, very trying and they finally made at three o'clock in the morning. We were all desperate there... they came and we didn't know if the [army] was going to come back because they took notes, right? "Where do you live? What is your business? How much money do you have?" Those were very, very difficult times because there was no rule of law. When an officer stands in front of you with a machine gun in hand there is no talking to them. You say, "Look take all you want, my life is all I have so leave that alone." And on that basis... things like this happened, there were many, many, many other examples.

I remember another incident that had happened. While we were going through all of these line ups and so on, one police officer came and stopped my wife. Of course you know how Uganda is, it's a hot place, and you wear dresses. This police person came and told my wife, "Your skirt is too short and it's against the law in this country to wear miniskirts." My wife wasn't wearing a miniskirt but it wasn't very long either – it was knee-high length or whatever. He was just using this as an excuse to say, "You're coming to the police station."

We were sitting there and I say, "We have done nothing wrong, this is not a miniskirt, what law are you talking about?" There was some talk going on at the time in the country that miniskirts are going to be banned, things were getting carried away with young people and so on. But they just said, "Okay, you have to go to the police station."

We were in the police car and I persuaded to this police woman and said, "I am going to." She said, "Yes, you can come with her." So we were in this police car on the way to the police station and we were wondering what to do. She herself opened the conversation, "Do you really want to go to the police station?" We said, "No." "You know what you have to do." So this is how things happened, it was against your principle to bribe people, but when your life is at stake, what do you do? Whatever you have you give it to them and they say, "Okay," and you are on your way.

Many people went through these kind of issues and lost their lives, I'm sure there are accounts of that but... we had good fortune. In our family nobody was physically harmed. Emotionally, completely drained. Emotionally the scars are still there. So when you want to reflect on your memories the good memories are always overtaken by the bad memories you carry with you.

As you also mentioned earlier on, it was also leaving behind our personal belongings and so on, it was our friends. We had so many African friends, African colleagues at work, who we were so close to. To later on find out that what happened to us... even worse had happened to them. We were all in Kampala which is in the Buganda province, the people in the army were not from this ethnic background so they always look at Buganda as the [inaudible] privileged people of the country. They always get the good education and the money and all that. They were always looked down upon but they couldn't do much

because Buganda was well educated, you know, good business people and so on. When they came to power they bore the brunt of it.

They got the brunt of it, and so many of my friends at university – I went to Makerere – and I know I had colleagues there. I found out that day after day they disappear, they run away, they leave everything behind. Later on after we moved to Canada and tried to keep in touch to see what's going on with Uganda, we found out many of them had just disappeared.”

Yasmin: “Yeah, that’s the next question I was going to ask you. So you did keep in touch with a few of them? What about now? Have you lost a lot of contact or have you...”

Participant: “Over time we did keep in touch with quite a few. I was once pleasantly surprised, I had gone to Tanzania on a conference and we were doing something about teacher and the government was very interested in what our institutions were doing. They had said, “We are going to have a reception for you and one of the government ministers is going to come here.” And I was pleasantly surprised, shocked to find that this minister who was there was actually one of my colleagues in Kampala at the university. So it was good to just catch up with him.”

Yasmin: “Did he recognize you?”

Participant: “Oh, yeah. I said, “How did you make it here?” He said, “I was lucky I got out in good time, others were...” he gave me a little account of some of the other friends that I had, what happened to them. And he said, “You won’t believe what happened to them. Only a few of us were able to get out.” And he said, “I managed to use my good education that I had acquired and I was lucky, now I am in a political office and I am enjoying what I am doing.””

Yasmin: “Fantastic! And what year did you say was this conference in Tanzania? Do you remember roughly?”

Participant: “Right, so between ‘84 and ‘89, but it could be probably ‘85 - ‘86.”

Yasmin: “That is amazing.”

Participant: “It was good to bump into him. Then through other friends and so on we did keep in touch. My younger brother who also was at Makerere, he had many, many African friends and he was in touch with them more than I was over time. Through him I was able to get a sense and found that really they suffered way more than the Asian community that had to leave. Especially if you were not part of the inner circle of the military. You know Idi Amin at that time started to become a really popular person because he said, “I am here to rob the rich and give it to the poor.” So everybody was saying, “The Asians are leaving so I can have his house, this Asian is leaving so I can have his business,” and so they all started to support this guy and then finally they realized that this guy didn’t have the qualifications, the capabilities to run a country.

Things really started to go down the drain, and as you know, the country went through a very, very difficult time and they have not recovered from it. Even today you see a beautiful country that was known as the Pearl of Africa because the country was naturally endowed with good resources and tons of coffee and sugar and fruits and vegetables, and the greenery. Uganda was a very, very green place of abundance. Then he just decided that he will not have any respect for ownership, it may be yours but it is not yours anymore, it belongs to the people. So we lost everything.”

Yasmin: “But you haven’t gone back? Have you been back to Uganda?”

Participant: “I did not go back, but I did go to the neighbouring country of Tanzania. I was planning to go to visit, but some of my family members did go there to see if they could retrieve some of our assets that were still there. I just did not have the heart to go back. No, I never went back.”

Yasmin: “Would you like to go with your grandson to show him?”

Participant: “I have always been tempted to do that, I have planned... as I said, I went to the neighbouring country because my wife is not from Uganda, she is from one of the other countries. So I took my children to that homeland, to the homeland of my wife. But yes, one day I would like to take them to Uganda as well.”

Yasmin: “It could be very special...”

Participant: “It would be very special to show.”

Yasmin: “...Could be very emotional. But you know... because they are calling the Ugandans back. I heard just a few years ago.”

Participant: “Many people have gone back, but at the end you have to have your own things that matter to you most. If safety is number one to you and knowing that it doesn’t matter what happens... you are going to that country and you cannot sure what could happen tomorrow. They could take away your privilege to go there. There are people who are brave, who are courageous, and I know for a fact many people have gone but they don’t take their families with them.

That’s not the lifestyle I would want to have. I know I could go back, if I were to go on my own we’d be comfortable in terms of safety and so on because it’s just me, I could look after myself. But I cannot take my family, my children and my wife and so on. So I don’t think that I would ever want to go back.”

Yasmin: “So can you tell me a little bit... you mentioned your family migrated from India. So tell me a little bit about your parents, how old were they roughly at that time?”

Participant: "Well these are, again, unfortunately stories that we did not capture in detail with today's immigrants, as you said earlier on. But from what I recall my grandfather was born in India, but my father was very young. He told us he was about ten years of age when he and some of his brothers got onto the ship and left Gujarat and came to the East African shores. He was about ten years old when he came.

My mother was born in Uganda because her parents were already there the generation before, it was a family that had been there for thirty or forty years before my father came. Then he never went back. From the shores eventually they made it to Uganda, they made it their home."

Yasmin: "That is good to know. When did they leave Uganda... in their fifties?"

Participant: "Yeah so my dad was in his late fifties."

Yasmin: "Late fifties when he left Uganda. Okay, just a little bit about your education and then maybe you can tell me something about when you graduated and the job that you had there."

Participant: "I had actually graduated and once I graduated I went to get my master's from overseas. I got my master's and I came back to Uganda, and I was intending to continue my education by doing a doctorate and moving on to further my education which I was interested in. When I went back I got married and so I thought I'd take a year off before moving again to go for higher education. I stayed there and I worked for one year but I was still thinking, what is my next plan? It was to go overseas to get further education. That was the plan and then all of a sudden this happened."

Yasmin: "Okay so let's move to the second phase now. So you landed in... do you need to? So you landed in Montreal. What do you remember? Were you excited? Were you scared?"

Participant: "We got on the plane and had a final look at our homeland, then the flight took off and then we were there. For a while we wondered, what is going on? Where are we going? Are we ever going to see our family again? So all those things were there and I think – if I remember – at that time all the airline hostesses were there, and everyone came to cheer us up, see us off and say, "Hey, we are going to a new country. You'll love Canada, everything is fine. Don't worry about your family.""

Yasmin: "And it was an Air Canada flight?"

Participant: "Yes, it was a special airlift. Our experience at that time really made us wonder... who are these Canadians? They were so nice to us. These people were making us feel at home when someone was kicking us out of our homeland and they are here saying, "Come to our country." Our initial experience with Canada was a very pleasant one, and especially with the people who were at the embassy who did all of our processing of the applications. The way they treated us, the way they spoke with us, the way they enabled the processing of our applications whether it was the original application or the medical exam that we had to do, and so on. So everywhere we went this experience continued.

On the airline itself we were exceptionally well treated and I remember after a while – I think it must have been about when we were airborne at 3,600 feet or whatever – and they announced that we were going to have a little celebration and they opened a bottle of champagne and we said, “What is champagne?” We had heard about it, but that was not part of what we drank or whatever. But we said, “Oh, okay, we see it in the movies that you celebrate with a bottle of champagne.” So they actually served the champagne and made a cheers and said, “Here is to a new future, a new homeland.”

The flight itself put us at ease. It was a long flight, we could not sleep because of the worries and the anxiety that were there, but we said we had to look at the future and start a new life. We started to read up on the flight – most of us – opened up things about Canada, climate, job opportunities, economics, and political setup.

So time was spent trying to do that. It was a long flight and by the time we arrived in Montreal we were just exhausted. We came out of the flight and the first thing that hit us was a camera, there was press like you wouldn't believe. Again, you see this in the movies but it was new to us. All these people were from the press taking photographs, this and that. We were being told this is very common in industrialized countries. When events like this happen it makes the news.”

Yasmin: “It was the first flight.”

Participant: “It was the first flight. So we were of course all in the headlines the next day – “the first load of Ugandan refugees land in Montreal.” The experience in Canada was frightening also at that time, what is this? The reason we were frightened was... is this going to be in the press? The photos and so on... how will it be seen in Uganda? We still had family there and we didn't want to jeopardize their safety and all of that.

Then everybody wanted to interview us, and again we were very, very hesitant to say because they would ask you point-blank questions, “How was it in Uganda? Were you treated badly? Was your life at risk?” How can you tell them anything right there, right? It was a very trying circumstance in that initial time of arriving at the airport. Of course we were all there, taken and put through the formalities and making sure we were all given some papers, we were told to hold on to this – what they call landed papers – at that time you didn't know what they meant but hung on to them.

Then we got onto this bus and they took us and all of a sudden we saw the place they were going to take us which was where we were going to stay. It had some names written on it, the Government of Canada, something else, and it said “army barracks.” We were... you know, we were shocked. We just left an army we were running away from and now you are putting us back into an army camp? But of course these armed personnel that were there were very different.

Apparently what the government had done... they had made set up some of these barracks that were used by the army for training, and that was going to be the place we were going to stay. We were all

brought in and we were all made to sign all kinds of forms and then they gradually put us in different rooms. They made sure that if you were already a couple you were given some privacy, or if you were a big family, they would put you together.

So again, our experience was just amazing. At the time they were so nice to us. Then of course after a while they would say, "It's time for dinner!" Because we were all hungry and of course food was not as easy [inaudible] at that time. They didn't make any special arrangement to... because it was a rushed, rushed time. In a time of crisis, nobody is worried about what you are doing at that time. Here again it was a very pleasant surprise that we all went into the dining room and lo and behold they had an Indian meal for us. We were all like wow, this is like home. As you know, when things like this happen it's emotionally so touching.

We were given a nice meal and people were saying, "You have nothing to worry about, just relax. A day or two and you'll get the business going." So we stayed there for I think about a week and in that we were given all the opportunities of what the next steps could be. And of course the question being asked to all of us is, "Where would you like to settle in Canada?" Because Montreal was just a stop, you are here... and from here you will have to go on. And we thought by reading about the climate and all that, we thought well, Vancouver would be a good place to go. So we said, "Yeah, we want to go to Vancouver." And they said, "Okay, we'll set you up."

Finally, you know... government provided us with all the spending money and some clothing. Because when we said, "We are going to Vancouver." They said, "You are going to need two things, you need a nice jacket and an umbrella because it rains a lot in Vancouver." And we said, "Okay."

All of us Ugandans who were going to Vancouver were going to board a plane wearing a big overcoat and umbrella in hand. Then we realized what they meant because once when we came to Vancouver, lo and behold it was raining. So we got on the plane and we went to Vancouver. Here again in Vancouver they had made arrangements for us to stay in either places like YMCA or some hostels, or even some airport hotels temporarily, or friends and family. So that's how we ended up in Vancouver. And then there of course, life began a very different way."

Yasmin: "So when, approximately... for one week you stayed there?"

Participant: "One week."

Yasmin: "What did you select? Hotel or YMCA?"

Participant: "Well they actually assigned it, so we got a small room downtown. A small hotel in downtown, we went there. But one thing I forgot to mention... one of the pleasant experiences that we had was while we were in Montreal... in those few days that we had relaxed and got acclimatized to a new life and so on. But at that time there were many activities that were going on and one thing that

intrigued us and you know, we were very anxious about knowing what drives these people who were there working.

And they were all talking about hockey. Of course we didn't know what ice hockey was, and how important it was to Canada. But at that time when we arrived a very important international game was taking place, and it was a hockey match between Russia and Canada. And when we there the final game was going to be showing, so that's why there was all this hype. Everybody was talking about hockey and this and that. There was a game that was going to be shown on television, and so they were all walking around saying, "Hi, how are you doing? Come and watch the game, come and watch the game."

We all went and we could see the passion that people had, and the most exciting thing that happened that evening was in that game. It was a close sports game and Canada beat Russia. You could see the amazing celebration that took place in the army barracks to celebrate Canada's win. It didn't hit us until later on when we started reading the papers the next day, then we started to understand what hockey was all about. We could see this was a country that yes, rain was going to be a part of our life, but so was hockey. Because that's what..."

Yasmin: "And you got to know about it pretty fast."

Participant: "Pretty fast. So we could relate to it right away. And lo and behold as we started to settle down and we all got TV units, we watched hockey. It was about the people who were there, they had some passion in life and they took it seriously. They enjoyed it and they wanted everybody to feel proud of their country and of their victory over the Russians, which was at that time a major, major achievement. It was very patriotic to be supporting the hockey team."

Yasmin: "So did you ever try ice hockey?"

Participant: "I did not play, but I did try but got our children to. Because it was early days there was no time for recreation, it was a time to find a job, put the food on the table. How do you then worry about your family? Everybody of course wanted to bring them to Canada, there was the whole process of trying to sponsor them and bring them.. eventually my brothers and my sisters were able to come to Canada.

My parents could not because of a technical issue, so they had to go live in a camp in the UK. So they went to the UK and lived in a camp. We were talking in those early days and it was very trying. But they were safe and we were all so, so relieved that finally they got on a plane. That was perhaps two days before the deadline. My parents were finally able to get on to a British Airways flight based on their very skimpy paperwork that they were British subjects. On that basis of course the British took a whole bunch of people that way.

So they went there and they were put in a... I don't think it was an army camp... some kind of a camp. A very interesting thing happened to my parents, which is again a story that we tell our children and

grandchildren. While we were in the process of doing all this paperwork, we realize it was going to take some time so we told them to just get into the camp. Now, in the camp the people who came to visit from Britain, from London came and [shared] everything that they had.

Then one day a gentleman and his wife came — and out of his good heart, he wanted to come and see how he could help. He came and he talked to a lot of people. Our father spoke English so when the conversation started, this person, this got to talk to my dad and he said, “Oh you have so many stories to tell, I’d really like to sit down with you. What do you think if you and your wife come and stay with us until your children figure out a way of taking you to Canada?” So my parents write to us and say, “What do we do?” We said, take it, you know... a good experience.

Fortunately for my mom and dad they stayed in that camp for a very short time and they moved to this couple’s place who put them up for about a month, or two months. They were very, very pleasantly surprised by the offer. We are still in touch with these people after forty years. Just about a year ago the couple visited Vancouver and of course my mom and dad had passed away by the time they came here, but we just couldn’t find words to thank them, it was such a touching thing that happened. So they were there and then finally we were able to get all of the sponsorship papers done and my mom and dad also moved here. Finally our family was reunited after some trying circumstances that we all went through.”

Yasmin: “Wow that was a lovely story. When you came here and stayed in the hotel, how long did it take you to get a job here, for you and your wife to get a job?”

Participant: “Well, the job didn’t come right away. Every day it was going and knocking on the doors, didn’t know what the process was because you know, what do you do? You make up resumes and you mail them, you look at newspaper ads. One amazing thing that happened as part of the Canadian government approach and strategies to assist Ugandans is that they had this big room available, it was called the Manpower Office, which was human resources, but during those days it was known as the Manpower Office.

In those days we all used to go in the mornings and there was job postings there, there were councilors there. Every day we would go there and we would find opportunities that perhaps we could do. I started applying and so on but the most frustrating part was that everywhere we went we tried to sell ourselves and by trying to sell ourselves we were trying to make our potential employer think we are really good at things. That was the wrong thing to do, because the job that they perhaps could have offered us, the word was overly used was that we were “overqualified”.

So that was one thing, next time don’t say you have a master’s degree. I would say, “can speak English, I’m willing to work, give me anything, I am ready.” Then you get a job quicker than giving your resume with all these degrees. There were no jobs... it was a tough market at that time. The second biggest problem we all faced was every employer said, “I’m really impressed with what you have to offer, but you have no Canadian experience.” How can I have Canadian experience until you get me a job and I can



work here? But for them, that was the criteria. It was a tough market. So we got part-time jobs, I remember I said, "It's no time to be choosy."

I went and I saw an ad in the post office to sort mail. That was my first job, I went and worked in the Canada Post office just sorting envelopes all day. And at that time the system was, I remember... there were all these cubicles and two bags were given to you and you would start putting them according to... it wasn't postal code at that time, but some kind of indication for a geographical area, and so on.

We worked there and for me a really pleasant thing happened... every day I went back to the Manpower Office and sat there. There again one day I met a lady, an elderly lady who came and said, "You found a job?" I said, "Yeah, I found a job." She said, "Where are you working?" I said, "I'm working at Canada Post, it's a seasonal job," because it was Christmastime. It was Christmas... we came here in September, October, and so this was Christmas time, there was a lot of mail. She said, "Well that job is going to finish in January, what are you going to do?" I said, "Well, I'm coming here every day." She said, "What do you do?" She asked me a bunch of questions and said, "Okay, I'll tell you what, come again tomorrow and I'll tell you something that you might like." I said, "Wow, great."

The next day she comes to me and says, "Look here is the name of the person who works at the bank, go and see him." I said, "Wow, that's great, I will see him." And I don't know what to say but I was so excited the next day I went there, a half an hour interview, I came out of it and I had a job. The person says, "Can you start next week?" How that happened, I have no idea but I came home and I told my wife that I have found a full-time job. My first [full-time] job was with the bank, a position I stayed with for many years.

Then my wife who was a teacher found out that to continue her teaching job which she had a passion for, she had to get some local qualifications otherwise she couldn't teach here. The decision was that since I had a job now, and we had some food on the table, she should continue to pursue her degree and get a diploma and the education that she would need. So she joined SFU [Simon Fraser University] and continued her qualification [circuit] and eventually she qualified and worked as a teacher for many, many years."

Yasmin: "Wow, so you were lucky. On the education, background paid off."

Participant: "For my wife she was very lucky because she continued in her own field and so on. I had to make a change from my education, my passion of management and research and I wanted to do, history and economics, but I had to change it to a field of finance. So once I made the move I had to give up what my original plan was. But then life brought some opportunities to progress and we moved on."

Yasmin: "But would you have left the bank after let's say five years of working and changed your profession? Did you ever think about that?"

Participant: "I could have, but I enjoyed what I was doing."

Yasmin: "And you were moving."

Participant: "I was moving, I was progressing, and it was a very forward looking bank. It had good hiring practices and the program was good. It was one of the top banks in the country who had a very, very good reputation. And again, the people that I worked with, my colleagues and so on... I thought the environment was good. So I stayed with it."

Yasmin: "And you retired or you moved on?"

Participant: "I moved on and then I took some other work here and there but a large part of my employment was with the bank."

Yasmin: "[Inaudible] You have said some very interesting stories and you were telling me, "Oh my god, I don't have any." These are lovely stories that you gave! Fantastic stories."

Participant: "You know there is some substance to what the research is... but as I said, there are other emotional things that happened that perhaps you keep it to yourself, you don't want to talk about in the public, but at the end it was a successful story – at least for our family. There were some very, very stressful times and the loss of material things, which was common to a lot of other people as well.

But at the end when I talk to my children and grandchildren I say that we came in this country with two things that were ours that nobody was taking away, even Idi Amin couldn't take it away. It was our education... and who we were as a [family], he wasn't going to change that. There was a time we did what we could do, but there were many issues for people who lived in that country. Accusations went around that we were not genuinely there, we were just there to make money and all of that. So there were people who were taking advantage of all that. But to us – and there were many of us – this was our home, you know we were passionately in love with this country. We enjoyed our lifestyle, we were not rich or well off people, but we had a good standard of living and we had people, we treated them right, we were good to them.

So you know we have very, very fond memories. When those memories are then hurt because of things that transpired during those trying years, you don't want to all the time think back. You want to think back to good memories but you can't just think of good and forget the bad memories. So there are times when you don't want to talk about it."

Yasmin: "But then your children and grandchildren need to know. It is important for them."

Participant: "They need to know. It's very important, and this particularly happened when my grandchild – when I was talking about this project I mentioned earlier on – a lot of times at the dinner table this was the time that we were talking about [inaudible] about civil, ethnic wars, about Syrian refugee crisis,

about terrorism. We were all talking about that and so all of a sudden it became a very interesting conversation piece at the dinner table because look... we can relate to all this, you know?

What is it to be a refugee? What are the experiences that you see people are going through today? "To you," I tell my grandson and granddaughter, "These are just stories. To us we've seen much, much more into this story than you can."

And you know, we are raising money to help the poor. What does poverty mean? They are seeing that because of what the country went to after we left. [Inaudible] no incentive to leave or look after themselves. Poverty was one of the big factors that entered Uganda after Idi Amin, everything was going. So this is why you say there are memories, good and bad and you have to be very careful trying not to do them again, realize this is what happened. Especially when you see it happening to others, such as with the Syrian crisis and what is happening with the displacement of people today. Every day you hear a story about people leaving a country on boats and drowning."

Yasmin: "It's so sad when you hear that."

Participant: "It could have happened to us in a bigger way. We didn't have to get on a boat not knowing where we were going out into the sea. We were on a plane and we got out in good time. We are very fortunate and lucky to have gone through in good time."

Yasmin: "I also think that because all of you had amazing knowledge of English... I think that played a very big role in coming here."

Participant: "Language and our overall education. I think what also happened – which was very much in our favour – was that our education system was British. So in Canada, it was very easy to blend into, even though there are more differences than we realized. There is perhaps more influence of the American education system than British. The fact of English, absolutely. Many degrees were recognized, so why did we upgrade [our education]? Like my wife, her bachelor's degree was recognized but her teaching certificate was not because Canada – and B.C. in particular – had their own certificate for teaching, different qualifications and so on. Yes, you are absolutely right, the language has helped us tremendously."

Yasmin: "So talking about languages, what other languages did you speak in Uganda, apart from English?"

Participant: "Apart from English we had our own mother tongue, which my parents spoke, Gujarati, [Kutchi], then there was the local language that I personally knew quite well, [Luganda] and Swahili. Those languages were there, and of course now we tend to forget because we don't use it as much."

Yasmin: "I must say I do use a little bit of Swahili when I'm working. Once in a while when I see Kenyans... I still know a couple of words but I try to flaunt them [laughter]. So do you have any relatives still in Uganda?"

Participant: "Not anymore."

Yasmin: "Just a little bit about your present... your family, your grandchildren, you can brag as much as you want. I know you have been very appreciative of Canada, and how you were treated. So are you retired now, semi-retired? What'd do you do now?"

Participant: "Now I have formally retired, but I still continue to do voluntary service. I'm engaged in community activities, many of us feel we need to give back what has come to you. So yes, formally I am retired, spending my time with my grandchildren and doing things I was not able to do with a hectic work life. Whatever time I am able to devote, I do some service with the community."

Yasmin: "Anything else that you remember that we may have not gone through?"

Participant: "No, I think the experience of leaving the country in the circumstances that I have outlined briefly, whatever came to mind right now and then the experience of coming to this country that accepted us with open arms. We are grateful, there are no words to describe how grateful we are. There are no other things that were happening, we remember at that time the Prime Minister of the country, Pierre Elliott Trudeau was a hero for us, and you can see why. You know, it was the way we were approached, welcomed, treated when we moved here. When we came to this country they gave us initial support. At the same time, we made sure that we all took on our own responsibilities because that's a thing I really appreciated, to give you one example, is that when we were airlifted we said, "Yes, you are taking us to Canada and paying the airfare and the flights, but I don't have money for the tickets." They said, "No, this is the government of Canada special fund that will take care of it."

We were so grateful, because we thought we'd have to buy our tickets and all that. No expenses were to be incurred at that time. Then we came to Montreal and we finally decided that we want to move to Vancouver, they said, "Okay you are going to Vancouver. Here is the ticket from Montreal to Vancouver, it is going to cost you two hundred and forty-five dollars. We know you don't have money right now, but this is not a hand out. We are going to pay and when you are going to find your job, you are going to pay this money back to the government."

Some people thought, "Come on, I don't have money, why do you want me to pay?" But I thought it was a brilliant way of making us right away feel responsible for ourselves. Here I am, the government has done enough for me, now I am on my own. Yes they give me some support, but I can't just take handouts. Still today, I say that when I first found out the approach they were taking, [it] was just admirable.

I remember I came back to Vancouver and applied for a job, people were looking over your income and so on and they say, "Do you have any debts?" I'd say, "No, I have no debts but I owe the government of Canada three hundred and fifty eight dollars." And they'd say, "What for?" I said, "They paid my airfare from Montreal to here." And then of course the moment I got my job, I started to pay that off with the

government and I still remember on that day when I made my final payment. I wished at that time that I could continue making those payments. I [wanted to] continue even though I didn't owe... I felt that maybe someone else could benefit from it."

Yasmin: "How long did you do that for?"

Participant: "Well I didn't continue, I just had that thought. I had the feeling was that I wanted to do that. So it was a great gift on their part, to say, "Look, take charge of your own life, now go and look for a job, you have to reach out to people. Talk, knock on the doors, go out and go to an employer and tell yourself I can do it, don't be choosy, take any job that comes."

For the country, this was amazing that happened to us, it came as a blessing. Today we do our own part in trying to make sure we remain citizens of this country, whenever [we have] time to give back, we continue to do that every way we can, and be good citizens of this country. That's the example that we want to leave with our children."

Yasmin: "Exactly, that is fantastic."

[End of transcript]