

**The Ugandan Asian Archive Oral History Project**

An Oral History with Anonymous II

Archives and Research Collections

Carleton University Library

2016

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Narrator: Participant  
Researcher: Yasmin Jamal  
Date: July 15, 2016  
Session #: 1/1  
Length: 50 minutes  
Location: Vancouver, B.C.

***Abstract:***

The participant arrived in Canada in the fall of 1972 as they and their family were expelled from Uganda by President and Military General Idi Amin.

This oral history covers the participant's early memories from childhood in Uganda, and their upbringing in Canada.

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

Participant: "So my family came here in 1972. Our family was based in Masaka, Uganda. My immediate family and I were among the last to be lotteried in. My understanding is there was a lot of resistance that was set up by various governments and as Mr. Molloy explained in the presentation that it was a wait so the Ugandan government wouldn't necessarily know people's names. So we all had numbers assigned to us based on our applications and so we were lotteried in one after another. The day my family was lotteried in we found out... I remember I was four, jumping up and down on my parents' bed because they were so excited, they were so happy, they were so relieved. So we went from...

[Interruption]

Yeah, so that's basically how my parents I remember would go and check the numbers every day and it was a very... even as a child it was a very stressful time. I remember quite vividly the curfew, the six p.m. curfew, all the lights had to be out. Lots of going to khane and praying and all that but otherwise living in the dark after six p.m. which, you know living on the equator wasn't that hard but still. Fear was palpable. One of my uncles, my mom's cousins had been taken away by the military never to be seen again. So that was something that my family lived with. My one uncle, my eldest uncle was a political official and so they were after him as well so there's some stuff that went on around that.

For my immediate family, my father became very ill with a couple of health conditions and so even though most of the family moved from Masaka to Kampala to be with my uncles, my father had to keep travelling back to Masaka for medical treatment by his doctor. As the youngest of four - I have three older sisters - I was the one who would go with them through all the military checkpoints and everything. So there is memories there... are in my mind for sure. Including a memory of one time my dad accidentally missed a checkpoint and got stopped and it turned out... because we had a shoe store he had given the guy free boot polish so the guy let him go. Another time we got stopped to give somebody a ride... which was scary, a guy with a gun in your car."

Yasmin: "So you were four years old, you must have been really scared."

Participant: "It was very scary. And it was confusing because I really didn't understand that we would never be coming back, you know. We had our servants who were family servants. I had my [yaya], my nanny, I didn't realize that I would never see them again."

Yasmin: "So that must have really left a mark on you."

Participant: "It's left an impression on me for sure. I mean there's always been a draw to Uganda for me. My father's family had been there for about a hundred years. So a long established history in East Africa, in Uganda in particular. This leads to the patriarchs of my family, and I talk about this on my own work. Talk about... you know, wax nostalgic about time and life in Uganda and it being so much better. Obviously I mean this is a very gendered experience, I'm sure the women's experience was very different, right? But yeah, so it was... it's an interesting story to kind of peel away the layers at."

Yasmin: "What about your grandparents? Were they from India or were they born in Uganda?"

Participant: "My paternal grandparents were both from India originally. My grandfather ran away to East Africa at a very young age, was married and his wife passed away. Then he went back to India and he married my grandmother, then brought her back. She was very young, he was in his thirties and she was about fifteen when he brought her back. And they initially settled in Zanzibar but the climate didn't agree with my grandma so they moved inland and my grandfather was actually one of the people who helped establish the town of Masaka."

Yasmin: "Oh, I see. So you said your dad had a shoe business?"

Participant: "Just at the end. No, just a store. We had a bus company, our family had a bus company."

Yasmin: "In Masaka?"

Participant: "I don't know if it was based in Masaka but... I would have to find out for you. Dad worked there but as the youngest he was taken advantage of, let's just say. So he started his own business with a little [inaudible] store, a shoe store."

Yasmin: "Okay, that's really good. You had some of those experiences, but can you share a little bit more of your dad's... you forgot to stop at one of the checkpoints and he gave them the shoe polish?"

Participant: "Well the guy had been in the store earlier in the day and the guy recognized my dad. So it was just good fortune, very good fortune. I mean I don't know what they would have done, it's hard to say. It was all very volatile. So yeah my father had... and when I say my father had given it to him, basically he had probably come in and taken it. I think that's how it worked back then."

Yasmin: "That kind of worked well then."

Participant: "Yeah, it worked out well for him. It worked out very well for him."

Yasmin: "So do you remember anything as a child, going from home to the airport or anything like that? I mean it's a long time ago."

Participant: "Do I remember? It was a very long time ago, and I don't remember the physical journey from home to the airport. I mean home was Masaka, we were temporarily living with my uncles in Kampala, and the airport was Entebbe, right? So I don't remember the physical journey to Entebbe. I remember being in the airport for a very long time, a long, long time. But you know as a child an hour is a long time, so I'm not sure if that's a real memory or not."

We came I believe on Air Canada, or an Air Canada affiliate to Montreal, and I thought we spent one night there, but my sister informs me that we had actually spent three nights there. So... treated incredibly well. Incredibly well, and I mean as a child, you know to me to see all this food laid out on the table was pretty miraculous, right? Not that we didn't have food, but... and then we came to Vancouver. The reason we came to Vancouver is one of my sisters went to school with a Canadian girl and her father was a professor at the university and because my grandmother lived with us, my father's mother... we needed a place with a milder climate. So they had said, "If they ask you where you want to go, say you want to go to Vancouver."

So that's what we did, or my parents did, they said they wanted to come to Vancouver. So of course that was the winter where they had the worst snowfall. Yeah, so it was a shock. As I mentioned my father was very ill when we first came, so he spent the better part of two years in the hospital. Yeah, so my mom - who spoke English, but not as well as she speaks it now - you know had to struggle to look after a family of seven."

Yasmin: "Wow that must have been hard."

Participant: "Yeah, she is a remarkable woman. Her children were aged four to fifteen, all girls."

Yasmin: "All girls, and teenagers, hard for teenagers being in a new country, trying to fit I guess."

Participant: "Trying to fit, living in one room hotels, you know. Initially we were put in the Riviera downtown, and then moved to a place over on Kingsway at the little cottages, cottage type motels. Yeah they still have those, and I remember getting together - there was lots of Ismaili families, well not lots but there was a few - and getting together with them and saying du'a [Ismaili prayer] and stuff at night, trying to form some semblance of a community because really it was so foreign. Even in my four year old mind... and it was the seventies, the early seventies and it was the time of the hippies, everyone looked weird to me [laughter]."

Yasmin: "But you must have enjoyed the snow, it was your first experience with snow?"

Participant: "I don't remember. I just remember it was a struggle, I've never been a big fan of snow. I don't remember my first experience with snow, probably as a kid I did enjoy it. But it was just very, very different... it was a culture shock. Then the hardship, the hardships of not having any money, you know my mom was doing factory jobs. She was a trained bookkeeper but she couldn't get hired as a bookkeeper because she lacked the language skills, they weren't strong enough even though she went to ESL [English as a Second Language] and whatnot. She persevered, my mom."

Yasmin: "Have you ever sat down and talked to her about all these things?"

Participant: "Oh yeah, all the time. Yeah, it means a lot to me, the whole experience, the keeping of our history. It's a history that doesn't make it to a lot of history books, right? I'm sure there's millions of

cultures around the world that are the same, but I think it's an important one and I think it's also important to look at - and I talk about this in my research - about experiences of racism that we experience, but also the racism that we perpetuated in Africa, right? We weren't very nice to the black people in Africa. So I think that's important, and Idi Amin really exploited that when he gave the order for us to be expelled, that he rightly pointed out that we didn't integrate. Not that he was right in any other way."

Yasmin: "I guess at that time nobody really looked at it through the lens of racism. You know the word never really existed, kind of... maybe it did but..."

Participant: "Yeah, but just because the word doesn't exist doesn't mean that the experience didn't exist, you know. Were black people allowed to run the cash registers at our stores? No they were not. And they're still not. I mean I know Ismaili run businesses in Kampala and there's still an inherent distrust among Ismailis of black people. For me..."

Yasmin: "It could be among Ismailis too."

Participant: "Very much so. There's a real class differential, there's a huge class differential."

Yasmin: "Money or anything, there's distrust there too, right?"

Participant: "Very much so, absolutely. And it's in all cultures, it's exclusive of the Ismailis, it's something that was of import to me and the fact that Idi Amin was never brought to justice is a huge source of pain for me. I was just listening to the Massey Lectures last night on CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation], and that was one of the examples that was cited. The failure of the international courts to bring him to justice. He was a mass murderer! He was a mass murderer, a small scale Hitler he was. So..."

Yasmin: "And he uprooted so many lives. Like you said, your uncle just disappeared. You know that must have been heartbreaking for your aunt and your family, where is he, is he going to be back, things like that. Does your aunt live here in Vancouver?"

Participant: "I think she's in London. I know her son is in London, I'm friends with him on Facebook. But I believe she is in London, but she could have passed too. I'm not one hundred percent sure on... this is my mom's cousin, so it's not my direct aunt or direct uncle. But we were close to them, right? We all kind of lived by and by in Masaka."

Yasmin: "So tell me... I have got a number of questions coming to mind, I hope I don't forget them. One thing is, I would like you to talk more about your thesis, because it is kind of connected here, right?"

Participant: "My thesis deals specifically with women like me who were born in East Africa, so also Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, but were raised in Canada or spent their formative years in Canada, or even

the United States a little bit. In forming their identities, dealing with Ismaili, Muslim, Canadian, African, and how they make sense of those identities. It's very intersectional, right? Because you've got gender being a factor, you've got class being a factor, you've got sexuality being a factor. Two of the women I interviewed were lesbians, so... I mean it was a massive thesis. It was supposed to be a hundred pages and it ended up being a hundred and sixty some odd pages. So I had to really limit the amount of information that I collected."

Yasmin: "So share a bit more on that, if you don't mind going into detail."

Participant: "What would you like me to share? What aspect?"

Yasmin: "Just... let's say on you. Like you decided on this topic because something within you?"

Participant: "I never fit in. I didn't fit in with the Ismailis, I didn't fit in with the Canadians. You know, I was a lone wolf in many ways. It was challenging for me and I had two distinct personalities. I had the - or not personalities, identities - the identity that I accepted and followed when I was in Ismaili circles and the identity that I accepted and followed when I was in Canadian or white circles. It was when I got married, I married a white man and when he and I got together initially and then I had to introduce him to this other part of my life that I had managed to keep separate for so long. It created a real crisis for me, a real challenge because how do I make sense of all of this? Then I had walked away from khane. I had started in my teens, and then when my dad died I just walked away. So you know, I feel a real connection to the community, I don't feel a connection to the religion and that's a long, long story in and of itself. And it's a source of pain for my mom, and it was a source of pain for my dad too. But I'm a grown woman so I can make my choices, right? I totally respect their choices, you know as I do of... I mean if I didn't I wouldn't be here."

Yasmin: "So then do you think if you were a little bit older when you came from Uganda, the whole thing would have been different?"

Participant: "How much older? I interviewed women who were in their teens when they came and I interviewed women who were my age or younger when they came. So... you know it's different how they reconciled it. I think it's also the culture of your family and how you're raised and the strictness of which things are imposed on you. And then it's your own mind and the education that you pursue. So I think all of those are... I don't think age alone is a mitigating factor."

Yasmin: "I was just thinking age from the time you came here and so many things happening in your family too, like your dad had been sick and your mom having around so many things. It must have been very hard for you. So I was just wondering because you are the youngest, right? But I guess you are right, so many things come into play."

Participant: "Very much so."

Yasmin: "So now can you share... you came here when you were four and you went to school here and maybe you don't remember kindergarten or elementary or whatever, but how was the schooling? Did you find..."

Participant: "The actual education was fine. You know I'm a product of the system and I've so far gotten my master's degree, and clearly I'm doing okay. The social experiences weren't as great. A lot of racism, a lot, a lot, a lot of racism in ways... I'm a very sensitive person so I pick up on nuances a lot, very emphatic, I pick up on nuances a lot so for me it was... I mean I have some really good memories and I have some awful memories. I have memories of when it was food day at school and taking mogo chips and having none of the kids eat them, or take them and then throw them in the garbage, you know? And those things stay with you, those early traumas stay with you. It's a rejection of you, it's a rejection of your culture. And maybe they were deciding factors in me separating the two, that when I was with Canadians I was going to be Canadian, and when I was with the Ismailis I was going to be Ismaili or what have you, right? I think I also... the one thing that was much more prevalent for me than other women in my research was the African identity. I always, always, always felt a strong connection to Africa because my dad loved it so, my father loved it and he would talk about it. He was born there and he did integrate with the Africans."

Yasmin: "He did what?"

Participant: "He integrated with the Africans, right? He had friends who were Africans, I don't think he would have let his children marry Africans, don't get me wrong. But... I don't know if you've ever seen the movie called *Mississippi Masala*? Very similar to the father in that, very similar to the father in that. So you know I had a huge, huge affinity to Uganda and I went back in 1994 and the minute I got there I knew I didn't belong there. The minute I landed I knew. Oh, yeah. I mean I loved it, I had a wonderful time, it was emotional, it was uplifting, it was heartbreaking, it was everything. You know, yeah I don't belong in Canada, but I certainly don't belong here, right?"

Yasmin: "So did you go with your family, or?"

Participant: "No, I went alone. I went alone on a safari so I did a three and a half week safari over land in Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda. This was right before everything broke loose in Rwanda I was there. So I barely got out of Rwanda. And then my husband joined me there afterwards and he and I spent two weeks travelling, much more luxuriously [laughter]."

Yasmin: "So then I don't know if you had the time during your visit, if you had talked to your dad about the shop and the house that you had in Masaka, did you ever..."

Participant: "We went to the house. Yeah, went to the house."

Yasmin: "And how did it feel?"



Participant: "It was emotional. It was very, very emotional. My grandfather built the house, and the roof was blown off the house. There was squatters living there, I think they pay rent too whoever. Which, to me... let them live there, let them enjoy it and have a peaceful life because they had such a horrible experience. I feel infinitely that Idi Amin did us a favour. I strongly, strongly believe that Idi Amin did us a favour by kicking us out because we avoided the war. Our refugee experience - not everybody's - but our refugee experience by and large was not as painful as the Syrians right now. You know we were so fortunate, so blessed, and... let the Africans be happy. Let them enjoy whatever we've left behind, we don't need it. We don't need it, we don't need an income from it. But you know those are my viewpoints, they're not necessarily shared by everybody in my family..."

Yasmin: "But your dad never went back?"

Participant: "No. He never went back, no."

Yasmin: "He never went back?"

Participant: "No. I was the first one in my family to go back, I went back in '94 and that's maybe four or five months after I came back dad died."

Yasmin: "But at least you told him the house was there."

Participant: "I took pictures and showed him. He cried and I cried. Yeah..."

Yasmin: "He was really attached to Masaka?"

Participant: "Yeah, very much so. That's all he had known, right? That's all he had known. My mom was actually... my mom was from India and my father met her and married her and brought her back. But my father completely... my mom has no interest in Africa at all. It was a place she lived for seventeen years, she's done. She's lived here most of her life, she doesn't want to go back. She's been to India a few times, but she doesn't want to go back to India, she doesn't want to go back to Africa, she's more than happy here."

Yasmin: "That's good, so she's settled here."

Participant: "She's settled and she's got a good balance of community... both her communities, right?"

Yasmin: "And she lives in Richmond?"

Participant: "Yeah. Did I tell you that, or did you know that?"

Yasmin: "No I know because when I met you the other day, I think your mom was there?"

Participant: "Yeah, she was there."

Yasmin: "I think she was there and I think we were sitting all together and we said, "Oh, hi," and I kind of... I think you were there and we were sitting with [inaudible] and everybody."

Participant: "Oh, okay. I think you guys were all sitting together and I don't think I was sitting there."

Yasmin: "Weren't you there?"

Participant: "No, because I remember talking to you just outside the shoe area."

Yasmin: "Oh, we were all sitting at the table there I remember. Just making sure everything is..."

Participant: "Yeah, no problem at all."

Yasmin: "So tell me more, anything you have to tell because all this is very interesting. You know you have brought in a different kind of perspective. Like you know people who came here, most of them were mid-twenties, thirties, forties, or whatever. So they had a totally different thing."

Participant: "Very different perspective, and they were already established in their communities because their formative identities had already been developed, right? People my age... it was a different sort of challenge but people took it differently too. One of the things I had, I encouraged them to do in my interviews were maps, identity maps. So draw me a map of what your identities are, and how it fits in. I had one woman, she drew a circle and then put a line down the middle. She goes, "I'm half Canadian, half Ismaili. That's it, that's my identity." And I said, "What about African and all this." She says, "No, none of that. This is who I am." So I think that people haven't struggled... some people have, I know them, I have friends. But some people have not struggled as much with the identity thing, I think they've reconciled it quite easily. For this woman in particular because she's very committed to her Ismaili faith, that she feels she's very comfortable in that identity."

Yasmin: "She is from Uganda too?"

Participant: "Yeah."

Yasmin: "Somehow I think the age may play a role, then coming here and how your family kind of settles. Of course there is no answer."

Participant: "Yeah, but my sisters are older than me."

Yasmin: "And how did they manage?"

Participant: "Well... I haven't spent a lot of time talking to them about it but I know that when they read my thesis they said they could relate a lot. Two of the three sisters have read my thesis and they felt they could relate a lot."

Yasmin: "Is it sometimes those feelings may be just buried within you? Like you know you were more [inaudible] and you wrote it out, how you felt and whatever. You know everybody's personality is..."

Participant: "Absolutely. Oh yeah I have one sister who is like, "I'm Canadian," and she embraces it. And for me I'm not at all convinced that if I was in trouble in another country that this country would help me. So, you know. But she is, she is one hundred percent convinced that Canada would come through for her. But you know I've been an academic, I've seen a lot and done a lot and I know that's not always the case. Look at the situation with Homa Hoodfar right now in Iran."

Yasmin: "Too many things like that happening. But I think you are very right that we... not we, but the Ugandan Asian refugees that came at that time, and I know somebody made a comment that they want refugees in the real sense of the definition, you know? Because what we see with the Syrian refugees now, we were kind of... I mean a different lot."

Participant: "It was a different experience, I don't think that makes us any less refugees. When you're displaced not by choice, when you're kicked out of your country and you're stateless, you're refugees."

Yasmin: "No they were refugees, but you know when they went..."

Participant: "No I understand, I understand our experience far... it was a different time. But to me it's not a race, it's not a competition because if it is, they win. I have no problem with them winning because I am so grateful. Like when we were watching the boats filled with people and people drowning, and those little boys. It's still ongoing, but where's the coverage? It's still ongoing, people are dying every day trying to cross."

Yasmin: "Sometimes the media just highlights those things. There's a lot of things in Uganda too, the media tries to show what happened."

Participant: "There was huge racism too when we came to these Western countries. Huge racism. I mean we had eggs thrown at our house, we had threatening letters sent to us... you know, probably just by children but nonetheless. I have an aunt in England and her experience was very similar with the racism in Britain. Racism in Britain is pretty overt."

Yasmin: "I think in Canada we were very lucky, I think in Britain there was a lot more racism. Those people needed a very thick skin. But now everybody is flourishing in London, England."

Participant: "They are but there's a lot of problems. There's a lot, a lot of problems..."

Yasmin: "But the Ugandans..."

Participant: "Ugandans are doing well around the world, Ugandans, Kenyans, Tanzanians. The Ismailis are doing very well around the world but you know we're chameleons, we integrate, right?"

Yasmin: "You mentioned that Idi Amin should have been tried for [inaudible] and all that. What do you feel if you were in power, what would you have done."

Participant: "If I were in power? What kind of power would I have been in? I would have brought him to an international court of justice. Something along the lines of the Nuremberg trials. You know because what he did was criminal. He's a murderer, he's a rapist, he's the worst of humanity. And not for what he did to our people, for what he did to his own people. I really... I said it earlier, I really think we got out lucky. I mean sure my uncle and I'm sure other Ismailis were killed in the process but it's miniscule compared to the number of Africans, black Africans that were killed by him. I don't know whether it's true or not about the bodies in his basement, and you know you hear stuff like that growing up. But brought to some kind of court of justice, some kind of truth and reconciliation, something... rather than to have escaped and got free. But I think that's true of a lot of dictators in the world that need to be brought to justice. It's a very toothless system that we have internationally for war crimes, when you think of some of the Serbians and Bosnians who are still being tried. You're interviewing me at a time where I'm feeling very cynical about the world, very disappointed in the world."

Yasmin: "Too many things are happening in the world."

Participant: "Too many things are happening in the world and I'm also doing a lot of reading and I think that's..."

Yasmin: "Right now when you hear all these things in the media about the terrorism, refugees and things like that and the refugees drowning and what state they are arriving, I think some of those Ugandans are kind of comparing it to that and saying, "Gee you know, we came that way but we made a different kind of [inaudible]. So you know things like that... I guess all these things when they show up on the T.V. or you hear, I think it brings a different message home."

Participant: "I think part of the problem is that Muslim is being conflated with terrorist, right? So the horrible attack that happened last night in Nice... I'm trying to figure out why they are deeming it a terrorist attack just because the guy is Muslim. Just because he is from Tunisia. I mean I understand he had arsenal or whatever, but is it domestic terrorism? They never talk about domestic terrorism, right? And quite rightly that all of us are more susceptible to dying in a car accident than we are at the hands of terrorists. It's very problematic. So I have my undergraduate degree within communications, so I'm very familiar with the processes of the media and I've never been so disgusted by the way they conflate the two. And then they don't cover so much stuff. You've got people on - I don't know if you have Facebook - but you've got people on putting the French flags over their Facebook profile and stuff like that. Did anybody do that when the attacks were happening in Baghdad, Karachi, Bangladesh, any of

these other places? They don't care about brown people. They don't. I have a twelve year old daughter, I have a vested interest in the future. I have a daughter who is very inquisitive and I have to teach her all this, and I have to teach her to navigate all of this. It's a challenge, it's a huge challenge."

Yasmin: "Yeah it's scary. So coming back to you and..."

Participant: "Sorry I got off topic."

Yasmin: "No, no! Actually all of this is connected. So your schooling, tell us a bit more about your schooling, So you came here and you were living at the motels downtown."

Participant: "Yeah, so..."

Yasmin: "Did you start going to school right away?"

Participant: "No, I didn't. I didn't start until I was five which was the year after and... it was hard to get in. I'm not sure what the reason was, but I think I got in late into kindergarten. And I went a full year to one kindergarten, then we went and moved into a rental home and I spent the better part of a year in another school for grade one, for most of grade one and then we bought a home."

Yasmin: "Oh, wow."

Participant: "My parents are amazing."

Yasmin: "That was really quick."

Participant: "They bought a home and moved to Richmond and finished off grade one there. Then switched off to another school that was closer and did the remainder of my elementary schooling there and then I went - they had a junior high, senior high system - to junior high, senior high and did the whole thing. Then UBC [University of British Columbia], SFU [Simon Fraser University], and then SFU again."

Yasmin: "So you did your first degree at UBC?"

Participant: "No, I started at UBC. I spent two years at UBC and it wasn't a good fit for me and so I decided to apply to SFU. I was much happier there."

Yasmin: "The communications program is quite good there."

Participant: "It was just coming into its own when I was there, so I graduated in '91, '92, something like that. So it was a smaller school then, it's much bigger now."

Yasmin: "Much bigger now and growing all the time, many more programs now. Then your dad after two years, sick for two years in the hospital or just at home?"

Participant: "He was mostly in the hospital. He had ulcers and he had diabetes and at that time they did take out parts of your stomach and stuff like that."

Yasmin: "Do you think it was kind of indirectly related to the stress from Uganda?"

Participant: "Oh, probably. My dad was a worrier, yeah he worried a lot. I'm told I'm like him."  
[Laughter]

Yasmin: "All the possessions and everything..."

Participant: "Yeah, I think it wasn't even the possessions, it's just his heart was there. But you know he adjusted very well in Canada, it was just his... he looked great, my dad. But he would just say - he's an auto mechanic - "The body is good but the engine is weak." [Laughter]

Yasmin: "So once he got back on his feet he started working and he had his own business?"

Participant: "No, he worked for Ford and he worked in different places."

Yasmin: "But he had to go through the training too then? He was a businessman there, so the..."

Participant: "Well... no, no he was a trained mechanic. Remember we had a bus company?"

Yasmin: "Oh, yes! Of course he had the bus company."

Participant: "Yeah he was a trained mechanic."

Yasmin: "Oh so that that was good that he found his own career, the field that he was in."

Participant: "It was more of a job than a career, but yeah. My parents were working class, we didn't have a lot of money growing up. You know... I'll tell you one memory when we were first here in Vancouver. We couldn't afford much in the way of groceries and my mom would try to feed a family of seven including my grandma. So we ate a lot of mug, right? I hate lentils, I hate them with a passion."

Yasmin: "A lot of protein!"

Participant: "I know, all these white people tell me, "Oh, it's a superfood!" I hate them. That's one thing I have, and I don't wear used clothes. We had to go to the Salvation Army to buy our stuff, to buy our clothes and stuff like that. And that kind of... I mean I know people who have no problem buying clothes second hand and whatever... I buy second hand stuff, don't get me wrong, I buy stuff off of craigslist."

But I won't wear second hand clothes. If my sister gives me clothes I'll wear them, but it's not the same. But I won't eat lentils." [Laughter]

Yasmin: "That's my favourite!"

Participant: "Is it? Well I don't think you and I can eat together then."

Yasmin: [Laughter] "Well I don't eat them every day, but I love mug."

Participant: "That's okay, I've been given a daughter who's probably going to become a vegetarian so she'll show me."

Yasmin: "That's interesting. So anything else that your mom and dad have told you that you would like to share."

Participant: "Not that I can think of off the top of my head. The story of our coming here wasn't remarkable if you contrast it to the current plight of the refugees but you know there were some challenges that my family faced with my father bring ill and whatnot. Such a huge family, and reconnecting with family all over the world, because not all the family ended up here. We had family that ended up in London, we had family that ended up... I had one of my dad's brothers who is the only family that ended up in a camp. I believe - and I don't know their whole story - I believe it was in Italy that they ended up, but they ended up settling in the states, in the Pennsylvania area."

Yasmin: "But that was a huge... I mean a very kind gesture that you guys had your grandmother staying with you all this time. During the difficult time, right?"

Participant: "Yeah, I guess. It was something my father was committed to so you know, she lived with us."

Yasmin: "Well another mouth to take care of."

Participant: "Yeah, yeah but it was..."

Yasmin: "I think your mom was very good, yeah?"

Participant: "Yeah my mom had a reasonable relationship with her, I think it was taxing at times because she was working and looking after her. She was also the youngest daughter-in-law in the family, right? My dad was the youngest of thirteen children and so mom bore the brunt of a lot of stuff. Fortunately my father was a... I wouldn't call my dad a feminist, but he was certainly more progressive than many men of his generation, so he wouldn't make a decision without consulting my mom. He actually made one decision without consulting my mom, which is actually relevant that I should have brought up earlier."

My uncles had all said because my family had only girls, that the eldest girl should be sent to Pakistan to live with my mom's brother there. So it was decided basically by my uncles and my father acquiesced and said yes, and he went to go buy the tickets and he didn't buy them and he came back. He just got royal heck from the family, "What are you going to do? What are you doing to do?" And he said, "It's my family, I'm keeping my family together." He didn't consult my mom but my mom was fine with that decision because she didn't want to break up her family either."

Yasmin: "That was a very good decision for your dad. You never know what could have happened then, right?"

Participant: "No, it would have been a very different life. My sisters are all professionals, and you know..."

Yasmin: "Let me see if there is anything else I can think of. So are you thinking of going back to Uganda with your daughter?"

Participant: "She wants to go, yeah one day."

Yasmin: "Maybe for the safari?"

Participant: "Well definitely for the safari, but I'd like to take her back to Masaka to show her my grandfather's, my father's house. Her grandfather's house, my dad had bought that house, you know?"

Yasmin: "That would be good I think, it's good to let them know."

Participant: "Yeah and she's interested in history, she really wants me to write the history down."

Yasmin: "Well that would be good. Do you remember anything about... if your mom has told you or your dad, if you guys received any kind of assistance from the government when they came here?"

Participant: "Oh, absolutely. Absolutely all the housing and stuff was paid for by the government initially. I don't know how long it went on, and you know groceries, and subsidies, and English lessons and that kind of stuff. Very much so, there was a lot of... certainly more support than they're probably even getting now. I don't know that there was medical or mental health support, I just don't know the answer to that. Do you know?"

Yasmin: "I think there must have been, none of the people that I have interviewed actually mentioned that. After a month you can apply in your area."

Unknown: "You get medical for a month, so you are covered."



Participant: "Does that apply to refugees as well though?"

Unknown: "Anybody. Well, because you are officially [landed] so after a month you apply for medical and you are covered if you couldn't pay for it..."

Participant: "They would pay for it for you."

Unknown: "Same thing now."

Participant: "Yeah, yeah, I know that."

Yasmin: "And they were helping them to get jobs and things like that."

Participant: "Yeah I remember. It was called Manpower [Department of Manpower and Immigration] back then."

Yasmin: "Yes, Manpower. But I don't know for the mental stress and for the trauma that they went through. They must be having something but..."

Participant: "There wasn't that emphasis I think on mental health back then that there is now. No, I just thought I saw a piece on CBC about this one woman who had her mother with her and her mother was very traumatized because she had lost some children in the war. And you know needing a lot of mental health support, but then having language be an issue as well, right?"

Yasmin: "I guess for us language was not an issue because... I mean a large percentage knew English."

Participant: "Well, yeah. Yay colonization [laughter]. But yeah, I mean it was a byproduct of that, right? So yeah very much so. I mean it wasn't... we were fortunate. We were very fortunate, fortunate by birth and by circumstance."

Yasmin: "And then some of the young Ismailis who are already here and came before, they formed a group to help each other. They were a lot..."

Participant: "Yeah."

Yasmin: "But you're right, maybe there wasn't anything for the mental issue everybody was going through. And I'm sure many people were, especially the older ones."

Participant: "Oh very much so, very much so. Imagine my grandmother, who would have been close to her eighties by then... you know having spent most of her entire life minus fifteen years in Uganda, queen of the roost. Coming here, not knowing the language, not understanding what was going on, you

know it was... I imagine it must have been really hard for her. I mean I was too young and stupid to recognize that, but you know in hindsight..."

Yasmin: "They must have gone through a lot. But that is an important thing you bring about. I think the next time I do some more interviews, I may ask that. You know, how did they handle that, especially from the older."

Participant: "[Inaudible] has also done some research on that, yeah because I used to do some interviews for her, she needed somebody who could interview in Gujarati so I interviewed a lot of seniors for her back in the... when would it have been? Late '90s."

Yasmin: "I know she has been concentrating a lot on the Afghanis."

Participant: "This is the old research, obviously."

Yasmin: "I think I had mentioned to her once, but if she has done a lot of interviews with the seniors it would be very helpful now to get that piece, right? I think you have touched on a number of things which were not - as I mentioned - in the other interviews. So I truly appreciate that, anything else that you can remember? Or if you do remember you can send to me via email, anything else I may have forgotten or whatever."

Participant: "Sure."

Yasmin: "Okay, thank you very much."

Participant: "Thank you, it was fun."

[End of transcript]