

**The Ugandan Asian Archive Oral History Project**

An Oral History with Gulshan Parekh

Archives and Research Collections

Carleton University Library

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Narrator: Gulshan Parekh  
Researcher: Yasmin Jamal  
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***Abstract:***

Originally from Mbale, Uganda, Gulshan Parekh arrived in Canada in 1973 after the Asian expulsion from Uganda in the fall of 1972.

This oral history covers Mrs. Parekh's early memories from life in Uganda, and her experiences during the time of the expulsion. Mrs. Parekh describes her travel from Uganda to London, England, where she initially settled before continuing on to Vancouver, British Columbia in 1973.

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

Yasmin: "Thank you for the delicious samosas and all the other snacks laid out for me. That chai (tea) hit the spot, I guess, we can now begin with your interview. Thanks for making the time this afternoon for me. I really like the location of your apartment in the heart of Granville Market."

Yasmin: "Ok so let us start with the first question of - How was your family selected to leave Uganda? Did you have to go through a medical, points system or by the passport you held at that time?"

Gulshan: "No my husband had a British passport, so we didn't have any problem and I travelled as a dependent on a temporary passport or temporary papers, to travel with him to England."

Yasmin: "That worked out well for you. When did you leave?"

Gulshan: "We left on the eighth of October."

Yasmin: "What do you remember when Idi Amin asked Asians to leave Uganda? What was your reaction? Please discuss in detail."

Gulshan: "First of all we didn't take it seriously, we thought that you know, he didn't mean it and we thought that he was joking. We were kind of worried and panicking and we didn't know what to do at that time whether we were going to leave the country or we were going to stay."

Yasmin: "Where were you when the announcement was made?"

Gulshan: "I was in Mbale."

Yasmin: "Were you at home or were you with friends?"

Gulshan: "I think I was at home, I heard it on the radio."

Yasmin: "Describe your journey from your home to the airport on your departure from Uganda."

Gulshan: "When we heard the news that we had to leave the country, we started making plans and my husband and I - at that time we were not married, we were engaged - and we were going to get married in August, so we thought we'd send some parcels to London because my brothers were in England. So we went to the post office to send a parcel and we were surrounded by two security spies... I didn't know who they were, but they said they were spies... not spies, but special forces police. They were in plain clothes and they said, "What are you doing here?" And I said, "Oh, we are sending the parcels." They said, "No, come with us." So I said, "Where are we going to go?" And they said, "No questions asked, come with us."

So they took us out of the post office and they asked us to sit in our own car and they said, "Drive to the railway station." This was in Mbale. So we were really worried and we started praying. Out of these two men one was stern looking and very serious, no smiles, nothing. The other one was a little but kinder & gentle, so I started talking to make it a little bit... not too serious. I said, "Oh, do you have a daughter in my class? Because I'm a teacher and it seems like maybe you look like your daughter." He said, "No, I don't have a daughter in your school." Then we just went to the railway station. So the one who was a little bit gentle looking, he stayed with us and the other one took my passport and went inside the railway station. The other guy tried to warn us to take off, but I told my husband that it's no point,

Mbale is a small town and we can't do that. We better stay put and see what happens. We were really, really scared, we didn't think we would be able to go home safe, they could do anything to us. We were really praying hard and after a while the guy came out and he said, "Okay, let's go back to the post office." So we had a sigh of relief that at least we were going back and I said, "Oh, where is my passport?" And he said, "If you want your passport, you have to go to Kampala."

So anyways we drove back to the post office and they just left. We were such fools that instead of going home straight, we went to the postmaster and we said, "This is what happened to us." And he said, "You know, you guys, go home right away. You are very lucky that you came back because the postmaster who has been in charge of the post office was taken in yesterday and he was not seen again." We were really lucky to be back, so we went home and my parents were waiting for lunch, we didn't say anything to them but our faces were really... you know I think our faces told them what had happened. My mom started crying because I lost my passport, and what will happen? How will we leave the country?

Anyways so that was the end of that, and then my brothers had come from London for my wedding and we didn't think of getting married right away because our minds were not working that way. So, we sent my brothers away because they had time to go back with their passports. After they left then everyone had to go to Kampala to verify their passports and I didn't have mine but I wasn't worried because I was going to be dependent on my husband's passport. And so my husband and I were watching from afar and we could see trays full of passports being seized and taken away and it was such a pitiful sight, very sad. People were coming out of the passport offices crying because they lost their passports. After that my brothers left and we got married quickly and then my parents said that they were not going to leave the country. They were planning to stay in Uganda. We didn't realize that would be that bad, and we were all thinking of coming back. My brothers said, "Okay, we'll come back too."

So I got married and I went to Kampala. On the way there were lots of checkpoints but they were not that aggressive at that time. But my aunt and their family had come from Kampala to Mbale for the wedding and they could not go back to Kampala for a week because the checkpoints were very bad and at times they were stripping everybody off their clothes. My aunt & family had applied to go to Vancouver, Canada but, they couldn't go to Kampala and go and stand in the line for Canadian visa. Anyways after a week my aunt's family stood in the line for the Canadian visa & got it. So my husband and I stayed with our friend and his wife who later went to Kenya. There were four brothers and we were staying with one of the brothers. So, then we all left Kampala on Oct 10 to go to Entebbe. These were the four brothers with us, they were my husband's friends. So they (army men) stopped us on the way and they told my husband (because he had a beard), they said, "Oh, you are a professor, why are you going, who will teach at the university?" My husband said, "No, no, my friends are going, I'm just going to Entebbe." That was easy get away.

As soon as we reached the airport we were taken into different cubicles for the checkup and the woman at the airport right away opened my purse, and I was just married, not even two weeks as yet so I didn't have any jewelry of my own but I was wearing my sister in law's bangles and earrings, so she took them away. And I said, "Look, these are not mine. I borrowed them from my sister in law and there was henna on my hands, so I think she took pity on me & put the jewelry back in the purse and she said, "Don't tell anyone."

I came out and my husband and his friends were there too. We didn't have money to buy tea or coffee because we didn't want to take any money so we didn't have to give a bribe. While we were waiting, the secret agents came and took 3 brothers - my husband's friends inside, leaving the 4<sup>th</sup>, the youngest brother with us. They did not know the reason they were taken in. So three were gone in and we couldn't concentrate on anything, we were so much worried, crying and praying all the time. And the youngest brother too was so upset and crying all the time and we didn't know what was happening inside. We didn't know whether they would come back or not.

We were flying by Egyptian Airways, so they treated us with coffee and tea and all that and then it was time to board the plane. Still no sign of these three brothers, so everyone was really worried what to do. But we did board the plane, then the plane waited until they were released. So, once they were on board the plane took off very quickly and they started kind of celebrating. They opened the champagne and all that and they started treating us, the passengers. Then we asked these friends, "Why did they take you in?" And they said they wanted to know that they had a line of Africans and they had made them stand in a line and they said, "Just point out who took the bribe." And these brothers said, "We can't recognize anyone taking a bribe amongst these people." So they questioned and questioned and in the end they let them go. So that was the reason for delaying them that long. So then of course since I was travelling as a dependent on my husband and my husband had the British passport so we went to England. But my brothers were in England and they already had a place to live, so after the immigration, we went home & did not go to manpower for any help, we just went home with my brothers.

Yasmin: "Where was home?"

Gulshan: "In London, England. But it was a really expensive apartment, it was really hard and within a week we started working there and stayed there for eight months. My husband didn't want to live in England because London was too busy for him and they were giving us houses on the outskirts of London. But because of the Ismaili community and Jamat khana's (prayer houses), we didn't want to go far. But my husband wanted to come to Canada, so my husband with his four friends went to Beirut to get their visa to come to Canada. Our friends got their visa from Beirut. We came to Canada in June of 1973 and we were fortunate that immigration or the manpower person came to receive us at the airport, because still after eight months they considered us as refugees. Then they took us to our hotel and then they found us the apartment. Then Mohamed started work, my husband started work soon and I went to Langara [College] to do a preschool training course, because I was an elementary school teacher back home. So, I did preschool training for a year and then I worked in a daycare, and after that I worked for the Ministry of Social Services for twenty-eight years at the welfare office."

Yasmin: "So did the Manpower and Immigration Department pay for your training?"

Gulshan: "They did pay for my training, yes."

Yasmin: "And they even paid for the apartment when you came here?"

Gulshan: "They did... yes, they did pay a few months' rent and then afterwards when my husband started working we stopped taking anything from them."

Yasmin: "What was your husband's first job?"

Gulshan: "My husband's first job was at a hotel in Vancouver, he was helping the bartender because he had restaurant experience."

Yasmin: "Back in Uganda?"

Gulshan: "There he worked in a warehouse for a few years and then he worked in a smoke shop after that some other places. So, this is my story, but my parents... I don't know whether I should tell you, but my parents had a very hard time. The president of the Aga Khan Council was a very, very nice man and he made sure that everyone left Uganda. My parents and their friends and all these elderly people didn't want to leave Uganda, they said, "Oh, nothing is going to happen." Then the Council President said, "No, everyone has to leave Uganda." He did not leave Mbale until each and every Ismaili was gone from Mbale and gone to Kampala. Then because it was kind of late, it was already November, so my parents and those who were left behind in Kampala were taken care of by United Nations. The United Nations took them to different places in Europe. So, my parents ended up going to Malta. My brother and I went to visit them in Malta, they were put in army barracks. There were lots of people there, some went to the States, or Canada, or wherever they wanted to go. But my parents wanted to go to England because my brothers were there. I was coming to Canada and I told them, "Come to Canada with us." But they wanted to go to their sons in London. However, they could not leave my aunt & uncle alone at the camp, as we always lived together with my aunt and uncle back in Uganda. My parents could leave to go to London, but had to wait behind. We would not let my parents leave my uncle and aunt, so it took almost a year and a half for them to let my uncle and aunt go on humanitarian grounds. My dad and mum could have gone a long time ago, but they said no.

They stayed in Malta till early 1974, then they were able to go to England. My brothers had to buy a house, they were just students and they didn't have the money so my husband's friend lent them a thousand pounds to buy the house. The house was in an auction and it was going for ten thousand pounds so the friend just put down a thousand pounds, then they could buy the house and my brothers... two of my brothers were working. They were students, but one was working and others were students so they were doing their summer jobs and they could get the mortgage, that's how they bought the house. That's how my parents could come to London."

Yasmin: "There was no help from the British government?"

Gulshan: "The government... they were giving them the allowance every week but they said that they must have a place to come because they were not going to put them in camp houses. So, they ended up getting an allowance every week, so that's how they managed. My brothers were still students, there was only one brother working and supporting the family."

Yasmin: "So how old were your parents when they left Uganda? Do you remember approximately how old your parents were when they left Uganda?"

Gulshan: "How old? My parents were in their fifties I think, my uncle and aunt maybe sixties."

Yasmin: "And they had a business there? What kind of business was it?"

Gulshan: "Oh, yeah. We had two homes, one in Mbale and one in Mukongoro (Eastern region of Uganda). Mukongoro was a business place, huge shops, big house, six bedrooms, and we sold everything like clothes, everything, you name it and it was there. It was a shop, so they had a very good business and they could manage to send the children to England for education."

Yasmin: "I guess that was the reason it was difficult for your parents to leave, because they had a successful business, right?"

Gulshan: "Oh yeah. Nobody wanted to leave because we didn't take Idi Amin that seriously and we thought that people would be able to go back. Otherwise, I mean... we wouldn't have left our work there like that because we were all going back soon. And it was really bad, really scary. They were going from... it was Eid (Eid is a time of celebration after accomplishing one of the most important religious duties: fasting during the month of Ramadan), when they were going to the airport and they had a slight accident, they were going by taxi and they had an accident. They were not hurt that much but still they were traumatized. But fortunately they could bring all their belongings because it was Eid and they were not that strict."

Yasmin: "Oh I see, but they left the house and the other possessions?"

Gulshan: "Oh, everything! We had lots of properties and we had a huge, big beautiful house in Mbale, a big bungalow. We left everything, they left with a few clothes, that's all."

Yasmin: "Have you been back to Uganda?"

Gulshan: "No, my husband went to view the properties, my brother went too."

Yasmin: "You got your property back?"

Gulshan: "There was... the government was giving the properties back but it was very difficult because we had a very beautiful house and it was occupied by the army. It was very difficult to deal with the army, so there was another man who was negotiating for us. My brother did all the paperwork and everything. But because the negotiator, was known by the army & was friends with them, he managed to sell it, but he, the negotiator took most of the money & gave us very little for the properties."

Yasmin: "But you haven't been back for a holiday?"

Gulshan: "I haven't been and I don't think I would like to go either. No, I don't want to go back. I see my town Mbale, and it's not what it was like before. I see on emails people send me pictures and videos and it's completely different. I wouldn't want even... there are a few mountains and towers, but nothing else, the streets are changed. I don't fancy going back."

Yasmin: "What are some of the things that you really miss from back home?"

Gulshan: "I miss the family, how close we were. It was an easy life, we had a wonderful life. I was a teacher back home and we used to go hiking, climbing mountains and have a lot of fun, play lots of sports. It was very peaceful, we had no worries, no particular worries so that was nice. But I don't miss it much anymore."

Yasmin: "Very nice peaceful life indeed!"

Gulshan: "Yes, I was very lucky. Otherwise, I think I would have ended up going with the United Nations to Europe and then on to Britain... because we were under the British rule. ... we still had our British passports, but they were expired, as we had renounced our British citizenship. I had a valid Uganda passport, which was taken away at the Railway station in Mbale.

Yasmin: "So in this case it was a blessing in disguise that your Ugandan passport was taken away."

Gulshan: "In a way, yes."

Yasmin: "I know it was a scary situation, but looking back, right?"

Gulshan: "Yeah, but it was very scary. We didn't feel that we'll go home, we thought that was the end of us because the railway station is far, kind of in the jungle, just one building. It's quite far and nothing else... just the bushes and trees, and we thought that was the end of it. Our parents wouldn't have even known what happened to us. We were just praying like crazy, I think maybe just talking to the guy helped a little maybe. The one who was gentle was very nice and he was talking to the other guy too, privately. So I think that maybe saved us but I don't know. It was very, very scary and after that we didn't leave home, we stayed home all the time."

Yasmin: "That was indeed a very scary experience!"

Gulshan: "And also because we had two places, Mukongoro and Mbale. In Mbale, we had very good Ismaili neighbours but they had left some time ago & some military guys moved into this home. My Mum and I were alone in this huge big house, my brothers were studying in England and my dad, uncle, and aunt were in Mukongoro. Though, we had a dog, I was always afraid of the military man next door. So one night Mohamed & I were packing and getting things ready for the wedding, we worked till midnight & then Mohamed went home. At about one o'clock in the morning, I was really upset and I didn't know why. I told my mum, and all of a sudden, there was a knock on my door. I said, "Mum, he's here, that guy." I was a young girl, so much frightened and the dog started barking and running up and down. We had servant quarters and I rang the bell in the servant quarters and he came out and said, "What's the matter Gulshan?" I didn't turn the lights on and I said, "There was a knock on the door," and I could hear the footsteps going to the garden. And he said, "Oh, I don't see anybody here," I said, "You know, I'm sure I heard a knock on the door and the footsteps," he looked here and there, so I said, "Okay, can you go and get Mohamed from the hostel?" So then Mohamed & the security came and but by then the military man had gone away. Fortunately, he went away."

Yasmin: "So he was really there?"

Gulshan: "Yeah he was in the garden but he went away. So then I told Mohamed "You are going to stay here for the rest of the night, as I am scared." Then I phoned my dad in Mukongoro & relayed what had happened and I said, "You better come here because we are not going to stay here alone."

So then he & my uncle & aunt came to Mbale, then we got married and then we went to Kampala, Entebbe and England.

Yasmin: "How far was Mukongoro from Mbale..."

Gulshan: "It was not far, it was thirty miles but thirty miles back home was far... you had to go through the village. It was not like every day you commute thirty miles like here. The roads were not too good either. You would only travel thirty miles on the weekend, we used to go to Mukongoro on the holidays."

Yasmin: "How do you spell that?"

Gulshan: "Mukongoro."

Yasmin: "I've never heard of it."

Gulshan: "Yeah, a small town. Approximately 10 families."

After my parents left Mukongoro, our neighbors saw what happened to our business, the army people and locals got into our shop and took everything away

Yasmin: "So you think this was army people who have taken everything, not local people or both?"

Gulshan: "Not local people... yeah local people were there too, and police, and they would just take everything away. But we were lucky that we left, those neighbors didn't leave with us. They wanted to go to Mombasa because originally they were from Mombasa. They ended up staying there for two more months and it was hell for them. They were afraid all the time, in the end it was very difficult for them to escape. They had good cars and someone came & took them away. They finally left one day at night time, and escaped all the terror"

Yasmin: "Were your neighbors Indians?"

Gulshan: "They were Sunni Muslims from Mombasa, and they went to Mombasa after two months so they saw what was happening to our business and our building. They saw that my parents lost everything, but they had money stacked up in the business place, thinking that if the banks were closed, they could use this cash money for their expenses, but they lost everything."

Yasmin: "Your father must have felt bad about the whole thing."

Gulshan: "Very, very bad. You know they were in Malta so long, they had a hard life in Malta in the army barracks. In the beginning it was good because there were so many people, so many families. Then one after another they started leaving Malta. My parents were one of the few families left behind. In the end my parents were able to leave for London. My uncle passed away in 1975, and my dad passed away in 1980, he was only 67."

Yasmin: "That was in England?"

Gulshan: "In England, they were happy that they were with their boys, their sons."

Yasmin: "Are you the only daughter?"

Gulshan: "I am the only daughter, yes. But because I was coming here, so my brother, Badru decided to come to Canada. Badru was a telecommunications engineer, he was working in London as a telecommunications engineer but the pay was very little."

Gulshan: "I am the oldest and next is Badru. Badru was lucky as his workplace had an opportunity for someone to come to Canada - they wanted somebody to come because they had to put the cable in the ocean or whatever. So they said, "Do you want visitor's visa or landed?" And he said, "I want landed." So he got landed immigrants visa, then they offered him a job and they offered him a salary. So he thought that you know, staying in Canada he might make more money, and if he made more money he could support our parents in England. He went back to London and he got married to Marie, then they settled in Halifax. Then my parents lived with my brothers and all three of them got married, so my parents were still staying with one of my brothers."

Yasmin: "Wow! Badru was sure lucky to get a landed immigrant status so easily."

So four brothers in total? Four brothers and one daughter, five of you."

Gulshan: "Yeah."

Yasmin: "So when your dad passed away, did your mom live by herself?"

Gulshan: "No, no, no. First my uncle passed away - and then my dad passed away in 1980, but because my aunt and my mom were like sisters they always lived together. So, they were happy, they lived together and my brothers took good care of them. Then in 1994 my aunt passed away, and then in 2005 my mom had a heart attack. I retired in 2002 and my brother and his wife were still working, so Badru my brother from Halifax and I decided to bring my mother to Canada. My brother sponsored my mum, she went to Halifax & stayed there for some time, however, we do not have a very big Ismaili community and she missed that part a lot! So, I decided to bring her to Vancouver, where there was a thriving Ismaili community. She stayed with me for ten years."

Yasmin: "Did she ever tell you about Uganda? Did she used to talk about Uganda?"

Gulshan: "Oh yeah, we used to talk all the time. My aunt was such a good businesswoman, she was very, very good at business. We look at... she knew all the math, accounting, you know, we'd say, "Oh two times ten," she can do things so fast. She was very good at business. There was time to talk, but they were happy, they'd watch videos, movies, go out."

Gulshan: "My uncle, my dad's brother, went to Uganda when he was only thirteen, fourteen years old."

Yasmin: "Where from?"

Gulshan: "From India. Then he went back and married my aunt who was only fourteen years. Then they went back to Uganda and stayed in Mukongoro all those years. Then my dad got married to my mon in India."

Yasmin: "What part of India were they from?"

Gulshan: "They were from Gujarat, near Jamnagar, they have nine little towns, Navagam county... like walking distance, each town is in walking distance. My mom was from Jivapar and my dad is from Balmbhadi. I still have my dad's oldest brother and his families in India; some in Jamnagar and some in Hyderabad. Others have moved to Jamnagar and Hyderabad?. Now they have also migrated to different parts of Africa, some are in Uganda, some are in Mozambique, and quite a few in the States."

Yasmin: "So these are your nephews."

Gulshan: "Yes, these are my nephews, my cousin's sons..."

Yasmin: "But no one has settled in Uganda though?"

Gulshan: "There is one nephew somebody told me... I haven't found out yet but somebody said one of them is in Kampala. I'm not sure, but I have to find out. But there is one cousin in Mozambique doing very well, he is in the industries and he's got sixty, seventy staff working for him, very prosperous and happy."

Yasmin: "That is very good to hear."

Gulshan: "I went to see my family roots, I went to India in 1970 before the trouble started. At the time my two aunts were there and my uncle, I had lots of cousins, they were all there. When I was going I thought they are in such small towns, I don't think I will like it there. When I went there, I felt so much at home, that it felt like I had come home. My mom's family, brothers and sisters, were all there and very welcoming. Afterwards they all moved together to Jamnagar and Hyderabad. There is always drought in that part of India(Gujarat) and poverty and that is one of the reasons my dad and uncle left India long, long time ago."

Yasmin: "This was good that they moved out of India and migrated to Uganda to settle there, a lot of people migrated in the early 1900s."

Gulshan: "Yeah I can't believe my mom... my mom was born in India, went to Uganda, went to live in London for thirty years, then to Canada, where she lived for ten years. So you know she's been to four continents. I mean quite a few of them must have done it but... she passed away at ninety-four but she was in good health, loved eating, loved food and her children and grandchildren."

Yasmin: "Rich history, interesting experiences of India, Uganda, London & Canada, I wish she was around to share her stories."

Gulshan: "I feel sad that my dad passed away when he was only sixty-seven, he had a heart attack. I really wanted him to come & visit me in Vancouver. My mom and my aunt used to visit me often. They really liked it here."

Yasmin: "Yes, your Mum lived a healthy life till Ninety-four! As you were an elementary school teacher in Uganda, you concentrated in this area of teaching - early childhood education, I guess you were in the daycares and preschools?"

Gulshan: "Yeah, at that time lots of daycare jobs were available but this one was a government run daycare, with very good programs and good equipment. I worked there for three years and didn't want to run the daycares so they were going to... what is it called? At the hostels they would always have... daycares, they wanted [YWCA] to run the daycares and everyone opted for the office job, but I was still interested in working for children. At that time, I wanted to work for benefits for the future, so then I was offered to work in an office, I didn't even know how to type because I was not interested in office jobs, I was more people oriented. But they trained us in the office, but it was very hard in the beginning.

Back home we had a very sheltered life, no welfare, families helped family members, no dropouts, adoption. It was very hard on me and almost for one whole month I cried because it was very hard. My husband said, "Why don't you just give up?" There were lots of other jobs available, and I wanted to open my own daycare with a friend, but my friend was not very sure. But I'm glad I worked in an office because it was an eye-opening... and I just thought I was put in an open world because I had a sheltered life, so I came to know so much. But it was fun working there... hard to see the poverty and all that. But my colleagues were very good, the ministry, the staff, and we had new programs all the time and there were no computers. I had to learn typing first, then learn computers, you are afraid to make a mistake on the computers [laughter]. So, I took office courses to make sure we didn't make mistakes. I think I came a long way learning all the systems and computers. And as computers were changing, the systems all the time were changing, yeah."

Yasmin: "And you worked for over thirty years?"

Gulshan: "With the ministry I worked for twenty-eight years. Twenty-eight... and then I retired when I turned sixty- four. But then I thought it was enough, you know? So I just retired when I was sixty- four."

Yasmin: "Good, that's really good. Not a lot of [inaudible], mind you, dealing with children and with the daycares and all that, and with the ministry of human resources, what you were doing was fulfilling. You saw the other end, which you had not experienced in Uganda."

Gulshan: "Oh yeah, definitely."

Yasmin: "So what languages did you speak when you were in Uganda?"

Gulshan: "We spoke... Khatchi, one of the Indian dialects. And I learned Gujarati and English."

Yasmin: "But did you speak any local languages..."

Gulshan: "Yes, we did. Swahili."

Yasmin: "So did you have to learn a new language here in Canada, or you were fine because you knew English back home?"

Gulshan: "Oh I was fine."

Yasmin: "Okay, so you have not visited Uganda you said, and you don't plan to visit?"

Gulshan: "No."

Yasmin: "And you said you may have relatives in Uganda? Or you have somebody in Gulu?"

Gulshan: "I still have, my husband's two sisters sons in Uganda and one of my cousins is also in Uganda, my aunt's son."

Yasmin: "That's the one that had come from India?"

Gulshan: "No this one is different, I'm talking about the one who went back to Uganda."

Yasmin: "So did you get to know them?"

Gulshan: "Yes of course, I knew them from Uganda"

Yasmin: "So now that you look back after more than forty years, are you happy to be back in Canada?"

Gulshan: "Oh yes, definitely. I'm very happy."

Yasmin: "You don't regret anything?"

Gulshan: "I don't regret anything, no."

Yasmin: "So you think it was a good move?"

Gulshan: "It was a very good move."

Yasmin: "It was a blessing in disguise."

Gulshan: "I would have loved to stay in England because of my brothers... and parents, as were very close to each other, but my husband didn't want to live in London. My brothers said, "Go see a new country, you have a British passport and you can always come back." So when I came to Vancouver, I really liked it because Vancouver was not as busy as it is now, nice fresh air and it wasn't that expensive. But I missed my family in England, as I was newly married and left for Canada. I still miss them, but it was a very good move. My husband was very happy and no regrets, we love this country and we love the city. Because a lot of friends came from the same town, my cousins and my husband's family, all his brothers and two sisters were here. I mean, the elders passed away but their families are here so we are still very close."

Yasmin: "Do you have any pictures or newspaper stories that you would like to share for this project?"

Gulshan: "I don't have any newspapers or pictures – we were not in that frame of mind. All we wanted was to leave the country safely."

Yasmin: "Anything additional that you would like to provide about your migration to England or to Canada, or your life here? Anything that you have left out that you would like to be noted."

Gulshan: "I think I said everything."

Yasmin: "Well that is interesting, interesting story. Everybody's story is so different."

Gulshan: "That's what I wanted to say, you know how these four brothers, the three brothers who they took, we never knew if they will come out or not."

Yasmin: "Yeah, I didn't understand fully, so correct me if I'm wrong. When you were at the airport, the youngest brother stayed with you and the three brothers were taken away because they wanted them to identify the local people who had bribed them."

Gulshan: "Yes."

Yasmin: "So they were taking bribes at the airport, I guess they were asking, right?"

Gulshan: "Yes, you know we didn't take any money with us as we did not want to give them a bribe. If you give a bribe then you are committing a crime and they are watching. So we didn't have any money and there were people ... who had lots of money and maybe they were giving money, I don't know. And probably, the woman who was looking through my purse, maybe she was looking for money and if I had money, maybe she would have taken it and let me go. I don't know, but I think she was a kind lady and she handed back my jewelry."

Yasmin: "I think you were very lucky."

Gulshan: "My sister in law left all her jewelry back home (Kampala) and I only carried a few of her jewelry pieces with me. Surprisingly, the lady at the airport did not take any of my jewelry. We went to Entebbe airport with four brothers who were my husband's friends. As soon as we arrived, we were taken into small cubicles, ladies on one side and gents on the other. Inside the cubicles, they checked my purse, pockets, etc. As I said earlier, the lady who checked me, put all my things including the few pieces of my sister in law's jewelry back into my purse. After having exited the cubicle, I saw my husband and one of the youngest brothers outside. This brother was crying all the time like a young boy, worried about his 3 older brothers who were taken away by the secret agents for questioning. They did not show up! It was time for us to board the plane, but the younger brother was still very emotional.

The plane waited for them. We had heard of people disappearing during this time. There was a lot of anxiety in the plane. Finally, they showed up and everyone cheered & thanked God for their safe return.

Upon asking what had happened & the reason of their delay, they said "the agents lined up some of the men who worked at the airport and asked us to identify if any one of them had accepted a bribe from us. They did not think anyone had! After a long interrogation, they were let go."

Yasmin: "Wow! What a terrifying moment. But the interesting thing that comes to my mind is how they decided to choose the three brothers out of the four."

Gulshan: "I don't know if they had offered a bribe, I have no idea."

Yasmin: "Because you were all together, but it was very scary even though..."

Gulshan: "Very, because they had taken the men in different cubicles, and then I was in a different cubicle and when they came out, they were taken away so I don't know what happened. The plane was waiting for us, we waited for them in the plane. Can you imagine? Their wives were in Kenya."

Yasmin: "So the plane that you boarded, Egypt air, was it full of Asians?"

Gulshan: "Oh yes, we were all refugees."

Yasmin: "So you must have been happy you were kept inside the plane."

Gulshan: "Yes, we were still upset waiting for them."

Yasmin: "Yes, of course."

Yasmin: "Well thank you very much for sharing your story. If you do remember anything else that you want to include in your story, just email or phone me and we can arrange a time to meet"

Gulshan: "I went to Kenya with my parents for my brother's wedding in 1975. We did not get to go to Uganda at this time."

Yasmin: "So tell me a little bit more about your husband, where was he from and how did you guys meet?"

Gulshan: "Mohamed, my husband was from Kampala. I met him through his nieces, who were my friends. Also, he used to give me ride home when I was at Shimoni Teacher's College (College that trained primary school teachers in Kampala)

Yasmin: "So how far was Shimoni from Mbale?"

Gulshan: "Probably 160 miles."

Yasmin: "Okay I get it, Shimoni is in Kampala."

Gulshan: "And Mohamed was in Kampala and I was in Mbale."

Yasmin: "Oh I see."

Gulshan: "Then we were in Kyambogo College... I did one year of home economics. Kyambogo, was a neighborhood in Kampala, Uganda.

Yasmin: "How long since he passed away?"

Gulshan: "Mohamed passed away in 2010, he had heart problems."

Yasmin: "That was nice that your Mum stayed with you"

Gulshan: "Yes, mum stayed 10 years with us.

[Interruption]

Yasmin: "So just coming back to this question. So when you were going from Kampala to the airport, you were stopped on the way correct?"

Gulshan: "We were, we were stopped a few times but they didn't harass us that much."

Yasmin: "So you arrived in Vancouver from London, England in 1973, eight months after everybody had arrived from Uganda, did the Canadian government still welcome you as a Uganda refugee? You had somebody at the airport greet you?"

Gulshan: "Yeah they came to the airport, picked us up & took us to a hotel."

Yasmin: "Wow! That was a nice gesture of the Canadian Government. Do you remember the name of the hotel?"

Gulshan: "[Inaudible] John's wife was running the hotel, I don't remember..."

Yasmin: "Right on Robson?"

Gulshan: "Yes, right on Robson. We stayed there and then moved into another hotel, I don't know which one. Then there was an apartment that was going to be vacant on Broughton Street, a nice apartment so we moved in there."

Yasmin: "That is good, more homely?"

Gulshan: "From the hotel we used to walk all the way to Woodward's because the fare was twenty-five cents which was expensive for us at that time, so we would walk to Woodward's all the way and back. The groceries would cost a few bucks."

Yasmin: "Wow! Food when you compare to today, was so cheap & so was the bus fare. I guess it was relative to wages received at that time. The Canadian government has been good to everybody."

Gulshan: "I couldn't believe it. I told Mohamed, if they had not accepted us as refugees we would have gone back to London."

Yasmin: "Okay, so once again if you think of anything else that you want to share, you have my email."

We can just sign off now. Thank you very much for the chai & samosas!" That was a great treat. Thank you for a very informative & inspiring afternoon.

[End of transcript]