

The Ugandan Asian Archive Oral History Project

An Oral History with Jit Davda

Archives and Research Collections

Carleton University Library

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Abstract:

Originally from capital city of Kampala, Uganda, Jit Davda immigrated to Canada in 1976, four years after the Asian expulsion from Uganda. Mr. Davda describes his early memories from Uganda including the types of games and activities he would engage with as a child.

While attending the University of North London from 1970-1974 for Computer Science & Statistics, Mr. Davda returned to Uganda for a summer holiday in 1972. He shares anecdotes from that time, as well as his experience moving from London, England to Canada in 1976.

Mr. Davda still lives in Calgary and spends his time giving back to the community by volunteering with a number of initiatives, including a program that provides textbooks and scholarships to his old school in Kampala.

This oral history was conducted in Calgary, Alberta with researcher Heather LeRoux.

Heather LeRoux: "I'll get started by asking you who your parents were and where you were born."

Jit Davda: "So I was born in Kampala, Uganda and my parents are both from Gujarat, India. My father was from a small town called Bankodi, Gujarat and my mother was born in a town called Khambhadia. They moved to Uganda back in 1930. My dad went first and then my mother followed him later, I'm not sure exactly when, but a few years later. My mother was thirteen years old when she got married.

By the time I was born my parents were well established and we had an eight bedroom house that was custom built by my father. Our shop was the only source of income and my father worked very hard to ensure that all of his 10 children got education and had a good life. My mother was a very busy home maker and provided excellent care to not only the family but assisted other close relatives and community members."

Heather: "What kind of business did your father have in Kampala?"

Jit: "They used to sell pretty well everything, they used to be called general merchants. So anywhere from, you know the grains to sugar and salt, mattresses, suitcases, soap and you know, pretty well lot of household kind of things."

Heather: "He did that throughout his life when he was in Uganda?"

Jit: "Yes, he started with a very small business because when he went [to Uganda] it took him a month to get there. Then he started a very small shop and started upgrading that all the time. At the end we were doing all wholesale to a lot of small businesses from surrounding towns and villages. He really made an empire out of that, he did really well."

Heather: "You said here that you had several brothers and sisters, and you're the youngest of the brothers – was it a family business? Were you all involved in that?"

Jit: "It was mostly my dad and then one of my brothers had to give up his education because my dad wasn't feeling well. So basically they were both running it, and the rest of them studied. To my dad, education was very important, he wanted to make sure everybody had good education and his focus was on that. He tried to minimize any interruptions from education, although myself, we used to have school early in the mornings so in the afternoons I would go and help him in the store. Which was very beneficial, I learned a lot, I learned the local language just by talking to people. I learned a lot about value of money and business concepts."

Heather: "So you grew up in Old Kampala area of Kampala?"

Jit: "Yes. Everyone lived in the same house, two of my brothers were married and had children. Two of my sisters were married and moved to Kenya. We had a cricket field and tennis courts right in front of the house. There was a big cement patio in front of our house and we used to sit there a lot of evenings. In the later years I used to go with my friends for a walk on the main road called Kampala Road, I used to see a lot of people there walking"

Heather: "What was your early childhood like? What was it like growing up there in comparison to...?"

Jit: "We had a simple life. We didn't have any fancy toys, the only thing we played with was marbles and the used bicycle rings and played a lot of games that didn't really need any material stuff, you know, it was tag and those kind of games. Movies once a month were a good treat, we used to also have drive-in cinemas. Television came in the early sixties and started with just a few hours of programming. Saturday mornings were very popular with cartoons, and the children from the neighbourhood would come to our house to watch. We used to play with marbles, used bicycle rims and some of the games like Kabadi and tag."

Heather: "Yeah, what was that?"

Jit: "Kabadi is basically, it's on a field and it's rectangular with a line in the middle and there's seven people on each side. The idea is you say "Hu tu tu tu" in one breathe and you tag as many people as you can without being caught by the opposing team. All the people you tag without losing your breath and returning to the centre line are out. If you get caught by the other team members and you are not able to return to centre line in the same breath then you are out."

Heather: "Okay interesting, so a complex tag?"

Jit: "Yeah it is, but again you don't need to buy anything you can just go in a field, draw your lines and do it, you know."

Heather: "So when you were in school did you play any sports or anything like that? Any extra-curricular activities?"

Jit: "No, sports wasn't a big at that time, soccer was a big thing but I never played."

Heather: "You said here that you liked math, could you tell me a little bit about schooling in Uganda?"

Jit: "Yeah schooling was, because Uganda was a British colony there were a lot of teachers that came from England and some other European countries also. The Education curriculum was from Cambridge University in England. For the final Grade 12 equivalent (called "O" levels) the examination papers came from Cambridge University in England. We used to have schooling all the way from grade one to twelve and then two years of pre-university, we used to call it A-levels, I think it was pretty competitive."

Heather: "Were there multiple different schools in...?"

Jit: "Yes, there were. I started with a school called Sanatan Dharma School where all the subjects were taught in Gujarati (my mother tongue) language. For the first five years I studied in that school and then I realized that I am going to fall behind if I don't join the other school. So I moved to an English medium school, Nakivubo School. The schools were structured similar to here, Primary, Secondary and then into University. That switch was very hard for me initially because of the English language. But then I caught up to it and things were fine after that. "

Heather: "Were your brothers and sisters close in age? Were you all in school around the same time?"

Jit: "Well, three of my brothers (elder than me) studied in India, so I didn't get a chance to study with them. Two of my sisters that were younger than me, they were in the same school"

Heather: "And after your A-levels, you said you went to University in London? Was that always the plan? What did you take in University?"

Jit: "That wasn't the plan, my plan was to study and to join the business because I really believed in it, saying my brother needs help, and my dad had passed away and my brother needs help and I need to be around. Then my eldest brother said that "I am going to leave my business and I will join the family business and you can go and study" because that is what my dad desired. So in 1970 I left Uganda and I didn't have very good grades because I was spending a lot of time in the business, so I went around to different universities and ended up in the University of North London, where they were starting a brand new course called computing and statistics. This was the first time they were offering it and they said, "Your math is very good, so maybe this might be appropriate."

So I took a chance and took that course, it was the best thing that ever happened to me. It was a four year sandwich program, whereby you spend the first two years in university, third year – the whole year – in industry, and fourth year back in college and doing a thesis at that time too, so writing a paper basically. That was a very good course actually, I really enjoyed that, and I learned a lot during my third year in industry working for a manufacturing company in Welwyn Garden City. It was a real eye-opener for me. In terms of my working environment, I learned a lot about Computer Operations and Computer programming. I got my best working experience in the Computer field and well rewarded for this.

Then I came back for my fourth year in University, you won't believe it but I did my paper on artificial intelligence (A.I.) back in 1973" [laughter].

Heather: "That's amazing."

Jit: "When I look at what they're trying to do with A.I., you know artificial intelligence now is, I could relate to a lot of things I was studying at the time I wish I had pursued on that [laughter]."

Heather: "I'm sure it has come a long way, it's amazing some of the developments."

Jit: "That's right, but the concepts are basically very similar. My research was to learn from previous experience and keep improving yourself based on past experience. In my research that I had done, I took a simple game, knots and crosses for example, and how you can store all the previous moves to figure out your next move. Its concept is very similar, its learning as it builds the experience."

Heather: "Right, interesting. So you went to London in 1970?"

Jit: "That's correct."

Heather: "And in the years leading up to that, can you describe a little bit the political climate in Uganda at the time, I know you mentioned the Independence Day ceremony so do you maybe want to describe what that was like?"

Jit: "Lifestyle in Uganda?"

Heather: "Yeah, what was all going on in the years leading up to the 1970s?"

Jit: "Well schooling was my main focus at that time, but I remember the independence, the hype, the first president. President Obote was a very nice person, well-educated and was well respected in Africa at that time too. Things were really, really good for the Asian community in terms of, they were running a lot of businesses, a lot of manufacturing, there were two sugar processing plants running extremely well. There was a lot of other manufacturing of soap and glass and books and all sorts of things. Mostly run by Asians and employing a lot of Africans there. So we were well respected and President Obote was

very much for that. At the same time, trying to educate a lot of Africans to move onto the next step. So when we started, I would say about 90-95% of the students were Asians, and then we started to see a shift in the demographics so we would see 30-40% of Africans taking school. This was very much encouraged and helped a lot of Africans progress. A lot of Africans were moving from small villages to bigger cities and prospering as well. A lot of the parents were getting into their own business and learning skills and developing their empire too, which was nice to see, a good balance of the two."

Heather: "And the expulsion happened when you were on summer vacation?"

Jit: "That's right, in summer of 1972 I went back home after two years of studying for a holiday and to see the family. At that time, Idi Amin was the president and he announced that all the Asians have to leave within ninety days. One of the things he asked was people that were Ugandan citizens were required get their citizenship verified. I was one of them, I had a Ugandan passport. And I said, "Since I am here, I might as well get my citizenship verified."

I took my passport to the immigration office and the immigration officer there went through my file and then said, "Sorry your citizenship is not valid." There was a big sack and he was going to throw my passport in there. And I said, "Hang on, hang on, what's the problem?" So he said that when I turned twenty-one, I should have renounced my British status to maintain my Ugandan citizen. I did not do that, there is no paper in the system telling me that. I said, "Look, I am a student in London, England, my lawyer looks after everything. We have a family lawyer who is only fifteen minutes away from here. Give me half an hour and I will go and get the papers that you need. I'm sure there is something missing here, he is a lawyer, he will know everything and he handles all our legal affairs." He says, "No, I am not allowed to do that."

In the meantime, there was a shift change and the next immigration officer came and said "What's the problem?" So I explained what the problem was and I said, "I just need half an hour to go to my lawyer and get you the papers that you need." So he was nice, he was in a good mood, he had just come back from lunch and I had got lucky. He said, "Okay I will give you half an hour." So I straight away went to the airlines office got my ticket and left the country on that day, I got lucky. Otherwise I would have ended up in Austria, that's where the United Nations camp was. Two of my brothers who in spite of having valid citizenship had to leave by the deadline time."

Heather: "Was that the case for the majority of your family or just your brothers?"

Jit: "Well my mother was British so she was able to go to London, England. The others were already out, two of my brothers were studying in England. I was there, my sister was British so she managed to come to London, England. So there was only two left, they ended up in Austria in a camp for a few days and then Holland decided to take eighty families, so they went to Holland for a few years. After that one moved to Toronto and the other one went to London, England. During these 90 days it was a very stressful period for a lot of Asian families and there was migration happening to all different countries. I was volunteering with an Immigration consultant every Saturday and saw a lot of families being split up and a lot of stress caused by people being in detention centers."

Heather: "Was your family able to all reconnect in one location? Or did you all settle pretty much...?"

Jit: "No we are all over right now. You know, I'm in Calgary, we have a brother in Toronto, one brother in U.S., one in Scotland and the rest in London, England."

Heather: "Were you able to communicate easily with your family or did it take you a long time to figure out where everyone went?"

Jit: "Initially it was pretty hard because they were in an Austrian camp, we could not connect with them, but after a few days they were allowed to make one call a day or something like that, so we were able to at least find out that they were safe. Holland was pretty quick in getting them up to speed, you know and taking them there, putting them in a... they actually took all eighty families and they all went to this resort that was empty. They put them there and taught them the Dutch language over there. Then slowly started to put them into different residential areas and provided all the help they needed. They were extremely helpful, very, very helpful and organized. So I did go visit them while they were in the camp, and I tried to help the other families that were trying to connect to people that were in England. That was quite a good experience for me."

Heather: "What was it like when you first moved to England? How was the adjustment period for you?"

Jit: "Big shock, you know, climate wise. We never knew what the temperature was back in Uganda as it was always steady probably around twenty to twenty five degrees. I never had a sweater in my life until I was about twenty. One didn't need one. Rains were beautiful, and seeing snow was quite something, and temperatures going into below zero and those kinds of things. We had never experienced that. That's when we started to think about temperatures and having to plan how to dress up was completely new to me."

First year was very hard, very hard. Different styles, different... I'm still a vegetarian, so getting food for lunch was hard. I ate a lot of chips and baked beans [laughter]. Wimpy's restaurant became my favorite restaurant as they served "chips and baked beans" there. I started getting used to the "western" way of living, appreciating all the good things and it was the best thing that ever happened to me. I'm in a good university, I'm learning, I'm getting excellent University education that will give me a very bright future. And when all the trouble started back in Uganda it started to feel even better – I started to think about how I could help the rest of my family to make this big adjustment in their lives."

Heather: "Going to University, was that your first time outside of East Africa?"

Jit: "Yes, first time out of home actually."

Heather: "So it was a big shock."

Jit: "Yes, yes it was."

Heather: "So you ended up getting married in London before you moved to Canada?"

Jit: "That's right, in 1974 I got married in London to my wife Mangla, my long time girl friend."

Heather: "How did you meet?"

Jit: "We were both in the same school, actually. My wife is from the same place, I used to be her math coach [laughter]. So that is how we met, we got along well, then we kept in touch, and then she went to India for a couple of years and then she moved to London England, where she did her nursing education. We kept in touch, and then we got married in '74."

Heather: "What was the decision to move to Canada then in 1976?"

Jit: "I don't know, destiny I think took me there. What happened was in my final year of university I went to the library and I saw my friend, who was filling out some papers and I said, "What are you doing?" And he said, "I'm filling out papers to go to Canada." I said, "You must be crazy, it is so cold there, how are you going to survive there?" That's the picture I had of Canada, you know it's too cold and not too many people.

So he started to talk and then he said, "Oh, accidentally they sent me two application forms, why don't you fill one out?" And I said, "No, no, I don't want to go to Canada." He talked me into it saying "fill one out, if you don't want to go that's fine." I filled one out and the Canadian immigration there – from the embassy – started sending me all these documents and I just started ignoring them until they sent me a final letter saying if you're not interested, we'll close your file. So I said I better do something, so I said, "Okay, let me go and explore."

I came to Canada, I went to Toronto, Calgary, and Vancouver and looked around. My cousin Vinay Dattani (also from Uganda who came during the exodus) was here in Calgary and said, "There are lots of opportunities here, oil and gas are just starting to boom." And he said, "If you want, you can come here." So I decided to go back, pack my bags and come here. My family was totally shocked saying, "What are you doing?" It was time to take another adventure trip and explore another country. That's how we ended up in Canada."

Heather: "So it took you a few weeks to find a job? What was that experience like?"

Jit: "Yeah, it was... my wife, you know for her it was very easy, she found a job in a nursing home right away. For me, they were struggling with my experience because the computers we used in England were different than here, and they didn't recognize any of my experience. So it took me a while, they interviewed me twice and then they had a hard time deciding and they said, "The only way we can start you is as a new grad," they wouldn't recognize my two years of experience. So I said, "That's fine, let me start somewhere."

So I started at Dome Petroleum Limited as a junior programmer. After six months they realized my experience and raised the salary. Very nice company, I saw the growth from a 600-employee company and it went all the way to 10,000, it grew very rapidly. But then we started having problems because they started acquiring a lot of companies, and the company grew too fast. The interest rates went high (high double digits), the oil prices went down (\$10 per barrel), and all those things ended up in the company being bought by Amoco Petroleum Company. But it was a very good company, it was the best company I've worked for actually, really good."

Heather: "So when you first moved here, because you had done a trip before and you had your cousin here, did you have your accommodations all set and ready to go? Or?"

Jit: "No, no, I stayed with my cousin for a week and then I stayed with another friend I had. Then I moved into an apartment in two weeks in downtown area and started there. I didn't have a lot of money, the rent was \$175 a month, which was a lot of money at that time. So we used to go on out in the buses and get all the groceries and everything which was hard. We landed on Valentine's Day in the middle of winter- pretty cold with no car for seven weeks so it was pretty hard. But once I got my job in April, I bought a car then we were fine. My cousin was very helpful in providing us a pathway to find all the things and help us move forward."

Heather: "Other than your cousin, were you able to reconnect with many people you knew from Uganda?"

Jit: "Later, yes I was able to find more people from East Africa that we connected with. People at my work were very helpful in terms of getting things done and knowing the Canadian system and all that really helped adjusting to the new lifestyle. Our Gujarati community had about 300 members and growing very rapidly. The community used to organize badminton every Wednesdays and Fridays, so I joined that club so I could connect with other people. And there were people from India, from all over East Africa, so it was nice to connect with them."

Heather: "Did you end up having children here?"

Jit: "Yeah, so we have two children. One was born in '76 and the other one in '83. My son is here in Calgary and he is the elder one. My daughter is married and she is in Toronto. Through my son we have a grandson, he is eight years-old, and he's a lot of fun [laughter]. So we take care of him every Thursday and Friday after school which is a lot of fun."

Heather: "That's great. And you mentioned that you went back with your family to Uganda, what was that experience like for you?"

Jit: "Yeah, in 2005 when my daughter finished her undergrad from University of British Columbia in Vancouver, I said, "Before you start to work, let's take this trip that I have been planning for a long time." So I took 11 weeks of unpaid leave from my work, we decided to go and explore. We went to London to visit the family for a day, then went to Dubai, and then went to Uganda. I wanted both of my children to look at where we were born and what schools we went to.

When we went to Uganda, the house that we stayed in was destroyed completely and they had built a market over there. So it was sad to see that, but we were able to see the hospital where we were both born, me and my wife. We went to the school, we looked at the school and there was hardly any maintenance done on that school, which was sad to see ... not even painted. The desk that I sat in when I used to study was still there, so I sat in the desk and took a picture. My children really appreciated us taking them there saying, "Wow, what a great lifestyle, look at the temperature," and all that, it was so good.

The population had – in Kampala, the capital – had grown probably at least ten-fold. It used to be a very nice, clean city but now there is a lot of people everywhere. Then we went to Tanzania and did a safari there, which was very nice, and then took them to India to give them some of our cultural values and experiences. We planned it so that we could see some of the key festivals like Diwali and Navarati (folk festival) and those kinds of things. It's a trip that we all still talk about, and my children they talk to their friends saying, "This is the best trip we've had." They really appreciated this once in a lifetime opportunity to experience various cultures, safari and different life styles."

Heather: "Did you pass on any traditions or anything on from your life in Uganda to your children? Or how was it raising them here in Canada?"

Jit: "We try, you know we try our best. They do believe in the culture and they do appreciate that. Whatever we can pass on to them to the community by practicing it at home and exposing them to the

community and the temples that we have here but at the same time they have to balance their life with the Canadian lifestyle.

One of the things was, back home, we used to have an eight bedroom house and two of my brothers were married, and their children, we all stayed in one house. And the feelings and the bonding that was there, and the respect. I never talked back to my dad ever, or my mother, or my elder brothers. Respect and all that, we lose some of that you know, because everybody stays in their own homes and they have their own ways of doing things, their own way of thinking and then you start to tell them certain things and they don't like it.

So those kind of things we do miss, but overall I am very happy that I moved to Canada. I think it's the best thing that's happened. I think people are really nice here, we have learned a lot about the Canadian lifestyle and Canadian values. And the option to practice our cultures, traditions, and religions is very well respected and I think we are very grateful to be here. We've done very well, things are going really well and our children have done very well too, they're both MBA's [Master of Business Administration] and they've done really well in their jobs. It has been a good experience."

Heather: "Great. I think that covers most of the questions I had but do you have any anecdotes or stories you want to tell, either from your time in Uganda or your early life here?"

Jit: "I think early life here when I compare it to Uganda was a lot different. Everyday people talk about, what's the temperature today? What's the weather like today? That never used to be a conversation back home. I think the four seasons here was a big change for us. The transition from Uganda to London to here helped me through that process a little bit in terms of [being] similar. Lifestyle in London was very hectic, you know, I didn't like the big cities, travelling in the underground and taking an hour to get to work. So I always wanted a smaller city and Calgary was just perfect, and now it is growing very fast. It was 300,000 population when I moved here back in 1976, perfect. To go anywhere was just half an hour.

So I like that lifestyle, the openness, and the Rockies being so close here. I think we live in the best part of the world, you know. We are not exposed to any hurricanes or things like that. The winters are – you know we get Chinooks here so that helps us quite a lot so it hasn't been that bad. I think by being in the inner part of Canada is a good thing. You know, we've got beautiful parks here, both in the city and outside. Just drive forty-five minutes and you are starting to see the mountains. I think it's been really good here, no complaints at all and people – my family members that come here and always appreciate the lifestyle here and the beauty we have and the peace we have here is just beautiful."

Heather: "When you first moved here, did you stay in your first apartment very long or did you move around a lot?"

Jit: "No, in my apartment I was there for just under two years and then I got my first house, a duplex. I moved around four times, and then in my current house I have been there thirty-five years now. I had it custom built, it's been really good, a lot of memories in this house [laughter]."

Heather: "Do you have anything else you want to share? I know you mentioned an incident that happened to you when you went to visit Uganda, or you were stopped on your way to Kenya?"

Jit: "Yeah, this is in Jinja, we were going in this bus, it's called Akamba Bus, it's just like Greyhound, it's a public transport. I was travelling alone so this was the most economical way of travelling. So when we go

to Jinja, which is about fifty miles from Kampala, we were stopped by the army and we did not know what was going on. They asked to get off the bus and we were asked to sit on the floor under the tree. Nothing happened, everyone was asked to keep quiet and all these army people going around with guns surrounding us. We were getting nervous and scared, wondering what was going to happen to us - are they going to kill us, or what? We couldn't get any answer and one guy tried to ask some questions, and he was kicked and asked to sit down, [they said], "Do not ask any questions just sit here, wait until we find out what's going on."

So that kept on going and even people that wanted to go to the bathroom and things like that, they would have one of the army guys go with them to the bushes and come back. That was probably the scariest time that I had ever had in Uganda, in my life actually. We thought we are gone, there is something wrong here, these people have no mercy, they are just going to kill. But luckily after six hours, they found out – we suspected – there was a group from Tanzania, I think they were spiritual leaders that were travelling together, they were probably suspecting them of doing something, I don't know what. We never found out the true story, after six hours they just let us go."

Heather: "And you were able to continue on to your destination?"

Jit: "Yeah. But that experience will always be with me - being under the gun all the time."

Heather: "No kidding, that sounds really scary."

Jit: "That's right. But those memories stick with you, you know? So you know when I see what's happening in Syria and other countries, in Iran and Iraq and all those places. I feel for them you know, I mean you are under the gun all the time and you don't know what's going to happen to you, right? So we live in the best country."

Heather: "Do you have anything else you want to add?"

Jit: "No I think we covered it all."

Heather: "Yeah, you did a great job filling out the questions that was so helpful for me."

Jit: "That's good. Well one thing I think that might help is... ever since I retired back in 2009, my focus has changed. I said my health is important. Canada has given me a lot, my community has given me a lot, my family has given me a lot, and it's time to give back. So I've been spending a lot of time, volunteering my time, helping at the library, teaching computer classes, things like that. Helping my community with... I've got a lot of project management experience so I said lets leverage on that. So I help community members plan their weddings, big events, no cost - everything is just voluntary work. I've been awarded life-time achievement award by my community twice.

And I've said, "What can I do for Canada?"

So that's my focus, how can I help, how can I give back? I want to get more involved in the greater community in terms of giving back, so I've been writing some letters to the Prime Minister's Office about ideas I have. The first letter I wrote was about oil and gas, oil prices in North America and I got a good response from them about the concepts. My second letter was about the First Nations people, so if you can integrate people from all over the world into our Canadian community, these people that used to own this country, why can't we integrate them? So I gave them a lot of ideas on what we can do I said

we can integrate them, the first generations will have a hard time but I think over the long term it is going to benefit Canada, it's going to benefit the First Nations people in being part of the society, move them into bigger towns and cities and integrate them, spend the money to integrate them so we have a onetime cost and they can enjoy the same benefits as the rest of Canada gets to enjoy.

To me, every week there is something happening, it's in the news saying this is what happens to the First Nations people. Why do they have to go through this? They were the first ones here, we all came afterwards. Let's bring them in, let's find the right people in their communities to work with and integrate them. And I know it's going to be hard, it's no different than when I came to this country and I struggled for a while, but there was enough help available and enough of the guidance given to make me successful. And we should be able to do the same thing for them. They've lived here the most, right? We owe it to them to do it. So I'm working on projects like that, and I'm project oriented, that's my strength.

I'm going to continue to do that and similar sort of things with the family. I'm going to document some of this history, I think we'll be able to get some of this from your project as well. And how do we pass it on to our next generations? I've been thinking about a website concept to get stories from all these different siblings and put it on this website, and share some pictures of the history and capture some of these things. Because we are all aging and we are losing all of that, right? So if we can maintain that I think it would be good. Yeah, so I'm working on projects like that. On my sixtieth birthday, my kids wanted something special and they asked me to work on something like that [pulls out a book] so I did a book like this. They sponsored it and I put it together, I worked with a consultant who helped me to write some of this and put some pictures in there."

Heather: "Great. That's such a nice way to do it."

Jit: "Yeah, it's got my history in here."

Heather: "Beautiful, that's great. So all of these photos, you were able to keep them because you went to London you were able to keep your photos?"

Jit: "That's right yeah. I left early right, so I had a choice."

Heather: "That's great that you were able to keep so much. Wonderful, that's a great book. Such beautiful photos."

Jit: [Looking at pictures in the book] "So those are the six brothers. That's my mother. That's our wedding. That's my son."

Heather: "Great picture. Wow that's such a great book."

Jit: "There is one other thing in here that I... I maintain family charts. This is my dad and mum and all the children, and their children, and their children. So there's four generations here and were all 102 right now, so I maintain these charts, and I maintain both the charts and wedding anniversary charts for the whole family, for 102 people there. Every time there is major event, I capture all that, somebody getting married or somebody having a child, or a grandchild, then I update this and send it to everybody by email."

Heather: "Oh great, that's wonderful. That's such a valuable resource for your family."

Jit: “Yeah it is. And people keep this on their fridge and its amazing you know because it’s hard because you don’t see them on a regular basis, it’s hard to remember all the names.

The other project I am working on right now, the school that we went to, there is a bunch of alumni that have all been there and said, “We have got to do something for this school. We found out about two years ago that the students that are in there, it’s a public school so it doesn’t have any private funding, and ninety percent of the students don’t have any textbooks. The teacher writes everything on the board and they all copy it down, a waste of time, right? So we said let’s do something. And there were children that were travelling five to seven kilometers just to come to school every morning and go back. They didn’t have any money to afford the fees and things like that, so we started sponsoring them for some of the fees and recently we launched a project to give them textbooks.

So we took two subjects and gave them all the textbooks. Rather than giving it to them – because some of them might sell it or do something – we built some cupboards in the school and the teacher would look after the books and give it to them during the class, and then collect it back so that they can use it for other students as well. Because the number of students has gone up, when we were there it was about twenty, twenty-five per teacher per classroom and now it’s like forty-five to sixty depending on the class. So the same desk, instead of having two people now have three or four people sitting at the same desk. So we, in April we launched the project to give them some textbooks, you know [there are] some pictures here of the textbooks that we are giving them or we have given them. So that’s the school, and these are some of the trustees that went there and some of the local people.”

Heather: That’s such a great project, such a nice way to give back.”

Jit: “Yeah. That is the representative from the Ministry of Education. We wanted to make sure we are visible and they know we are doing this. [Referencing photo] That’s the principal’s office, that’s still there. So we planted a tree there in memory of this project. Look at the vegetation, a lot of greenery. That’s our chairman, he’s involved with the polio foundation as well, he’s got polio himself.

So this is another project that I’m involved in, collecting funds and now we are working on the next phase, how do we learn from the two subjects and how do we expand it to other subjects. The embassy in London, Uganda’s embassy in London, they called one of our trustees saying, “Can you help us leverage this into other schools?” We’ll see what we can do. But here we collected, whatever funds we collected, one hundred percent went into the project. All the trustees we have, whenever we travel, we travel on our own funds. So there is zero administration fees and were working through a Canadian charitable society so we can give them some tax breaks in terms of charitable donations and things like that.

Over in London they’ve established a similar trust so they can give some tax benefits and help pay it. Now if we can, our concept was to buy books locally there that we were supporting local businesses over there as well. But in the next round we are looking at doing maybe a container load from England a) to save costs and b) we can see how we can help other schools. So we are trying to find similar organizations that are helping other schools to see if we can put our forces together and do a combined project. Yeah, so those are some of the things that keep me active and out of trouble [laughter].”

Heather: “Yeah, thank you for sharing those with me that’s great. Seems like you’re very busy.”

Jit: "Yeah, I don't have a dull moment. There's a lot of things that can be done. I'm involved in the funeral committee of my community to organize funerals, this is all charity work, and any families that are aging and they need help, I help them with the process. I organize monthly health seminars open to anybody that wants to come, we advertise. We bring in guest speakers, no cost for the seminars and we don't pay any of the presenters. We collect food donations during the seminars which we take to the food bank. So it's enough things to do to give back, I enjoy it, I love everything moment of it."

Heather: "That's great. Thank you so much for sitting down with me I really appreciate it there's so much great information."

Jit: "This must be a really great project for you in terms of, knowing history about a completely different country."

Heather: "Absolutely, and I never knew anything about the Ugandan-Asian refugee movement before. So I started three years ago just as a summer student and I have been here for three years. It's amazing, there's so much rich history and so many stories that are super valuable. So that's what we're trying to do, get as diverse a perspective as possible so you know every interview is new information right? It's a really interesting project and that's what we're hoping to do starting with the Ugandan Asian group because we are acquiring archival material and then maybe one day we'll expand into other refugee groups we're hoping to be more of like a refugee archive since the oral history project that we've done here has taken off."

Jit: "Syrian would be the next one right? That's the next big one right?"

Heather: "Exactly, yeah. And we have some connections with the [Canadian] Immigration Historical Society. So [immigration officers] who worked with Laotians and Indochinese in the later 70s, so we're going to try and maybe do that in the future, depending. So far the Ugandan Asian project has been amazing, there's so much to learn and so much to know."

Jit: "Are you thinking of going there and visiting?"

Heather: "Yeah, I would love to go one day. But I haven't travelled much, but I would love to go to East Africa, it would be a great trip for sure."

Jit: "Do visit Tanzania and take the safari. That would be good, and I've got a very good travel agent in Tanzania that can organize, and I've sent so many people and they've all been so happy. So if you ever needed that let me know. He's very good, and I think that's the best safari you can do. Better than the one in Uganda or Kenya, it's very safe. You'll really enjoy it, it'll be a once in a lifetime experience to do that."

Heather: "Do you think your children would ever bring their kids back to Uganda, or would that ever be...?"

Jit: "I hope so, at least my son has been talking about it saying I would like to take our grandson to India and East Africa one day. Because he talks about it all the time, and my daughter doesn't have any kids yet, so we're praying one of these days she'll have a surprise [laughter] but yeah, I'm sure she would want to do that."

Heather: "Well, thank you so much."

Jit: "Excellent. You're most welcome."

[End of transcript].