

The Ugandan Asian Archive Oral History Project:  
An Oral History with Cressy De Mello

Archives and Special Collections

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**An Oral History with Cressy De Mello**  
*The Ugandan Asian Archive Oral History Project*  
Archives and Special Collections, Carleton University Library

Narrators: Cressy De Mello and Evelyn De Mello

Researcher: Heather LeRoux

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***Abstract:***

Mrs. De Mello was born in Bombay, India and came to Uganda when she was eighteen to visit her older sister. She found a secretarial position at the Uganda Garment Industry Limited and subsequently worked for the senior accountant of the ministry of education. She met her husband Nick De Mello, a travel agent, and the couple married in 1970. Upon returning from their honeymoon, the couple learned that Idi Amin had overthrown the government.

Soon after the expulsion was announced, Mr. De Mello was taken to Makindye prison and interrogated. He was only let go after promising 50 000 shillings and all his belongings to the army. The family fled Uganda the next day and came to Canada where they first settled in Halifax, Nova Scotia, then St. John, New Brunswick, then Montreal, Quebec, and finally Toronto, Ontario.

Ms. De Mello reflects fondly on her time in St. John, reminiscing about the kindness that was shown to her and her family when they arrived. She speaks about starting the QGA, the Quebec Goan Association, her family's experiences with French education in Quebec and their eventual move to Toronto. She talks about her and her family's return trips to Uganda and her overall gratitude to the Canadian government and people for assisting them in settling in Canada.

This oral history was conducted virtually.

# Cressy De Mello Oral History Transcript

Heather Leroux: I'm just going to start with a brief introduction and then I'll just ask you about your early life in Uganda. Today is September 1, 2022, this is an interview with Cressy De Mello for the Ugandan Asian Archive Oral history project. I'll just get started and have you tell me a little bit about where you were born and your early life in Uganda.

Cressy De Mello: I was born in Bombay, India, and had a very normal life, protected life, with my parents, my father and mother were both born in Goa, but lived in Bombay. My father, (Gaspar Baptista) worked on the Indian railways as a foreman and was stationed a lot at outposts to fix the trains, so basically my mother took care of all of us. I went to a common school, every morning I did my breakfast chores and went to mass daily and had breakfast and went to school. I came home for lunch, in the evening joined the church activities, my parents were very strict, I was not allowed any social functions. They said that I have to finish school, no distraction from my studies. I finished my SSCE at 17. SSCE is Secondary School Certificate Education. and then went to Clare's Commercial College where I learned my secretarial skills: shorthand, typing, telephone operating, etc. I worked for a while for a colour chemical company in the heart of Bombay, my oldest sister had gone to Uganda when I was only five as my Mother's brother was there and he took her and my cousin to Africa for a better living. My sister requested that I visit her in Uganda as she was having her third child, and I could also see Uganda and She paid for my ticket to go to Uganda, so I went there by ship, which took 6- 8 days, which took 8 days, very interesting experience for an 18-year-old, I thought (laughs).

Evelyn: That's true. I don't think Larissa can do that... or Samaya.

Cressy: She found me company on the ship and the overnight train to Kampala. I loved Kampala, it was beautiful, green and more hygienic than India. They had the Kampala Goan Institution, a good, vibrant social club, with sports teams competing with other sports clubs. They had seasoned players at this club. My husband Nick loved sports. He formed a club for young teens who did not make it in the Kampala Goan Institution team, that was the seasoned team.

He and his group formed their own sports club and they played Cricket, and Field Hockey, Darts and Table tennis and all kinds of Sports, they also had found their place to meet, at the horizon sports club, which was a local sports club...

Evelyn: Dad started the Horizon's Sports club. As these younger players were not given playing time due to politics. They had a good membership of about 100 people. Dad was good at bringing people together. His passion was Cricket and loved Field hockey. Later on, in Canada, in the 90s, he also wrote for papers on Cricket and sports. His teams were Manchester United, the India Cricket team, the Montreal Expos and the Montreal Canadians. He would be glued to his short wave radio to hear games, and later satellite tv.

Cressy: I used to help my sister when she had her baby boy, she made me godmother for the first time. I used to go to an employment agency as my father in India insisted that I continue to keep my high typing skills. I practiced my typing there and then happened to be amongst a group of

Japanese people recruiting for their shirt factory “UGIL” which is Uganda Garment Industry Limited. And I ended up helping them while I was there. They asked me if I would like to take a secretarial position working for the factory manager since I was a secretary and they promised to try to get me a work permit. I agreed and they arranged a ride for me to work and back, as it was in the industrial area of Kampala. They applied for a work permit but were unsuccessful. I worked there for two years. My brother-in-law John later found me a job in the Government civil service working for a Senior Accountant for the Ministry of Education. He said that they had a work clause in the government, that if I worked for the government I could stay in Uganda. I was making more money in Uganda than India and they later sent me for an advanced, six-month, free secretarial course with accommodation at the Uganda college of commerce. I enjoyed that because I was alone and had nobody supervising me (laughs). After working for two years, for the Uganda government, in 1967 my father took ill in India. I am the last in the family.

Evelyn: The youngest.

Cressy: I was the last sibling living with my parents, and because I didn't return back to India from Uganda, my parents decided to go to Goa to live with my brother who was there. Now the Goa life was very hard in those days: they got water from wells and cooked with firewood, which was very hard for my parents compared to the Bombay life, which was much easier. We had running water and stoves a little more advanced. My father had said to me before I left that if I did not return in six months, he would die. That's how much he wanted me back. (laughs)

Because I was the last sibling left, all the others had married and left the coop. He created quite a havoc when I told him about me getting a job in Uganda and my other siblings had to intervene (laughs) And actually talk to him and say no, Cressy has to find a future, you cannot ask her to come back to India. Anyway, they are both dead now, so it makes me cry. I wanted to go see him-

I wanted to go see my Dad but had no money. I was discussing with one of my friends and they asked me to see my husband Nick, my late husband Nick was a travel agent.

Evelyn: So that's how they met, Mom went to go buy a ticket at this travel agency.

Heather: Okay.

Evelyn: To go back to India.

Cressy: He actually helped me, he gave me a ticket to go by ship and come back by air and told me I could pay him in six installments on my return. I was very happy that I could see my father. In the government I got one month vacation per year.

Evelyn: Hey Mom, take a break, take a break, you okay? Start again, in the government...

Cressy: In the government I got month vacation per year. I had worked two and a half years, so I was allowed to take two and a half month's vacation, going to India. I had returned from my vacation in February and getting ready to celebrate my 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April when I heard the news from India that my mother passed away. Very sad but true. I sent one of my fruitcakes prepared for my party to India and cancelled all my parties.

Evelyn: It's okay, Mom.

Cressy: This is how I met Nick and became friends, as he was Goan too, and from the same village Nerul as my mother in Goa. We got married in 1970 December and went on our honeymoon to South Africa by ship. On our return we heard that Idi Amin had taken over and there was a coup. We were asked not to return, to wait for a while till things settled in Uganda as we were travelling by car and had to cross the Kenya-Uganda border. It was quite a shock to everybody. My sister was going to India after she and her husband had retired. Unfortunately, her husband had a heart attack in Mombasa when they came to take their ship to sail India, and she had to proceed with all her four children, and leaving her husband in the hospital.

Evelyn: He was in the hospital recovering

Cressy: No, no, wait. We went to see him after we were told about his misfortune and when he got well we put him on the flight to Bombay to join his family. We then left for Uganda by car and were quite shocked to see the state of affairs in Kampala. It was a scary experience. Idi Amin could not even speak proper English and how was he going to rule the country was a big worry.

In 1971 we had our first born, it was very exciting to see our lives change. We spent a lot of time with Evelyn, that's her, my oldest. Nick used to help me a lot to bathe and feed when we had no maids around, because at that time my sister who was in Uganda had left, my only sister that I had in Uganda had left. So, I was alone, I had no family except my husband's family. The nanny looked after Evelyn while we were at work and we took her to the club in the evening to socialize because all our meals were all cooked by the maid and the cook, so we had no responsibilities at home, we would get up in the morning have our breakfast, come home for lunch, lunch would be served to us, we would have a little siesta and then go back to work and come in the evening, have a cup of tea and go for drinks to the club, that was very interesting, happy-go-lucky life. We had maids to clean and watch the baby.

A year later, we were expelled and my daughter Evelyn, although she was born in Uganda, she was made stateless, and so was my husband, who was a Uganda citizen. We were very scared when Amin took over. There were people shot and hurt and harassed. Once we were driving and the army guys with guns asked us to stop, get out of the car. I had a baby, Evelyn, in my arms. We were scared they would hurt us. They inspected our car; we were lucky there was another car following us so they let us go. In August 1972 we were given three months to leave.

We used to live in Mbuya close to the army barracks, which was not safe, so Nick's sister asked us to move with them. We lived with them for a couple of weeks and since we were not allowed to take our money with us, we used to eat out everyday and order meals and spend our money.

Nick was a travel agent and the army were attacking a lot of travel agents. They found one travel agent hung on a tree as his father refused to pay ransom and another taken in the boot of his car. They said, they accused them of sending money illegally out of the country.

We applied to come to Canada, we're waiting for our number to come in the papers for an interview because they had given us all numbers to register. And when our number came in the paper, we would go for an interview. The Christian brothers of Nick's old school in Kisubi were

helping us. One day when Nick went to work, he dropped me and asked me to go shopping for things to take. We could not take our money from Uganda, we were allowed only \$50.

After I came from shopping, this is hard, I found a friend in his office who told me that Nick had asked them to take me home—the army guys told Nick to drive his car at gunpoint to the Makindye prison where they tortured him and set him free only after Nick offered them 50 000 shillings and all his belongings. His car, his house, all his stuff, his fridge, etc. They arranged to meet him at City Bar on Kampala Rd. So, we dropped Nick there the next day and we hung around the area to protect him.

He gave them all the stuff and left Uganda the very next day. We were helped by the Canadian team. We had a sponsorship letter from one of our friends from Ontario to help us. We took the bus to the airport that day and Nick was hiding in the bus in case they stopped him for a further ransom.

Evelyn: I believe dad said he was taken on a Friday, the rushed interview was immediately done on a Saturday, And he had to pay the ransom on the Sunday. The flight was on the Monday.

I believe on that Sunday, Dad told us that they asked him to stay in Kampala as tourism is very important. They didn't know he was leaving Monday. They also wanted everything in the house including his car. He said the Fridge had a wire connected to an outlet (it was customized). An army guy wanted to take the fridge so bad that he was trying to cut the wire with his bite. Someone said he could get electrocuted. So he stopped. Dad's dog, a German Shepherd name Pepsi, was given to the police.

Dad said they were really happy that the Canadians had a bus to take them straight to the airport the next day that was escorted. I think it helped them feel safe.

Cressy: Yeah, they had a special bus for us, which had a Police escort in the front of it.

Heather: Oh, okay.

Cressy: When we arrived at the airport, Arthur, Nick's brother, who worked at the Entebbe airport, helped us a lot. We went through the usual formalities at the airport and breathed a sigh of relief when the plane took off. The Air Canada plane stopped at Las Palmas and we did not have full meals served to us, just snacks and milk for my ten month old Evelyn.

Evelyn: What's interesting is Uncle Arthur stayed in Uganda and he was there throughout and then I think he fled to Kenya for a little bit and came back

Cressy: Yeah, yeah, because he worked for the East African Airways, he thought he could take the first flight and leave if at all there was any trouble because he had Asthma and he didn't want to go to a cold country Canada where his health would be deteriorated further.

Evelyn: He even kept packages for my mom like wedding gifts and photos...

Cressy: That's another thing I didn't mention here, he asked us to pack all our belongings in two crates and when we arrived our destination in Canada, he would ship it to us, he would send it by whatever courier. And they were really huge boxes, [00:20:00] big containers that he had sent, so

we were very happy that he was going to do that and we had packed the boxes and kept them at Nick's brother Arthur's house.

So, I had all my household stuff, all my dinner set, my Kenwood mixer, all of my curios and I had a lot of animal heads, like a kob head

Heather: Oh yeah.

Cressy: Can you see the Uganda kob head in the back?

Heather: Yeah, I can.

Evelyn: Yeah, it's all from Uganda.

Heather: Oh, wow, okay.

Evelyn: Those were really expensive, they bought everything they could and then Uncle Arthur shipped it over. And his family still lives there today.

Heather: I was going to ask; is the reason he was able to stay at the airport because he was working for the airport? There wasn't as much of a rush?

Cressy: Yeah, working for the airline, yeah.

Heather: That's why.

Cressy: He helped us and it was a bit of a relief with the protection from him, right, in case army guys did come and say, "Give me some more ransom," or something, right?

Heather: Yeah.

Cressy: The Air Canada plane stopped in Las Palmas and we did not get full meals, so it was just snacks and milk for my 10-month-old baby.

Evelyn: Yeah, what I understood is the planes wouldn't stop to refuel because any African country that would help them, Idi Amin would look bad on. So, they didn't even stop

Cressy: They didn't stop at any other countries and we didn't get any food.

Cressy: On arrival in Montreal, we were faced with a vibrant city. We were driven to Longue Pointe where refugee helpers gave us a meal and beds to rest.

The next morning, they interviewed us and we asked them to let us go to Toronto where our sponsors were. But they said if we went to Toronto our sponsors would have to look after us and if we went to the place they chose, the refugees would be given help to look after all our needs. So, we agreed with that and said okay, we would go where you send us as long as you're going to look after us, so they booked us on the next train to Halifax.

When we arrived in Halifax, we were at the Nova Hotel on Barrington St. just opposite the Manpower office. We used to report to the Manpower office for our needs. We were given diapers, good thing for us because in Uganda we never used disposable diapers. We used cloth

diapers, so that was a luxury for us to be given disposable diapers. Then we were given seven dollars a day for our meals. And those days bread was 25 cents, gas was 45 cents.

Evelyn: You were put in the hotel for a month, I think.

Cressy: Yeah. Sometimes the kitchen used to allow us to make meals as we felt like eating our own food and some of the refugees there were also familiar to us.

Evelyn: So, they basically took over the kitchen. (Both laugh) And they made their spicy food or whatever Indian food.

Cressy: Yeah. I found a job as a secretary at the Bank of Nova Scotia. Nick, being a travel agent, went for a lot of interviews, but they wanted French to work for Air Canada. Finally, they found him a job in St. John, New Brunswick, so after staying at the hotel for one month, we were sent to St. John and put up in an apartment which they found for us and paid for it. After that we had to find our own way.

After that one month. I mean, money-wise, we had to find our own means. I had to quit my job at the Bank of Nova Scotia and since I was pregnant for my second baby I did not work, just took care of Evelyn. There was so much snow that we had to adjust to this lifestyle, which was very hard. Nick started his job and the people were very friendly at work, and in St. John in general people are very, very friendly. Nick was getting raises in salary every two weeks after he proved himself very efficient. He did run an agency in Kampala, so he was very efficient. He bought his Pontiac Astra car after waiting for the bus just one day in the cold. (laughs) He couldn't take the cold! He went and got a demonstration model of the car. We were happy we could get around more easily with the cold weather. The Air Canada staff together with J. D. Allingham travel agency that he worked for, their staff threw a big wedding kind of shower party for us, giving us all that we required to start a home, which was really good. They gave us crockery, cutlery, ironing board, iron, everything that we needed. They also gave Evelyn a baby romper with a sweater and cloth diapers. The Baptist Church was very helpful and gave us two hand-made quilts, big ones. One of the staff at the travel agency approached us and told us that Kierstead Mobile Homes at the trailer park had a trailer All furnished and was used for six months and they asked us if we would like to stay in it for a month free and see if we liked it. We did end up staying there; it was better than staying in a small, one-bedroom, very cold apartment- with just one fireplace, it had a fireplace, that's all. The neighbours at the Kierstead mobile home Park were very friendly. We used to have coffee mornings at different friend's houses. On November 21, 1972, my daughter's first birthday, we bought her a walker, which she very much enjoyed, she could get around. During Christmas we were showered with a lot of gifts, somebody bought us a big turkey, pans to cook the turkey, Christmas trees, and people were really friendly in St. John. We were invited to a lot of parties, too. Later on as he worked in the agency he was offered a trip to Barbados through the J.D. Allingham travel agency. Although he was stateless, he kept an old Portuguese passport made while he was in Goa. He managed to take that passport to the Portuguese embassy and they issued him and my daughter a new Portuguese passport which was simply amazing, as now he could travel with it.



Evelyn: I don't know if you know, but in Goa it was under Portuguese rule for a very long time until it got independence, and the independence, they went back to India, so...

Cressy: Yeah, India took over from the Portuguese.

Heather: Yeah.

Cressy: And when he was seven years old, he was schooling in Goa and that's when his mother made him a Portuguese passport. He held onto that and brought to Canada just in case, from Uganda, and he used that later to travel.

Evelyn: My Dad has eight siblings

Cressy: There are nine in the family.

Evelyn: There are nine in the family and so, now, with the trouble everyone was scattered all over the country. No one knew, like they didn't have email or cellphones, so with the trouble, [00:30:00] they didn't know where everyone was. My Auntie Rosie ended up in Chase, BC, my Uncle Peter was first in England then ended up in Vancouver, my Dad ended up in St. John's, and his youngest brother, Mario, was trying to find out where all his siblings- I know they're in Canada but where are they? So, I think he heard that Dad went to Halifax...

Cressy: Yes, we told him to come to Halifax

Evelyn: It was interesting how many of them were in the same country but scattered, and then some of them were in London. My dad's mother, Isabel, was on a trip to England, and was going to come back to Uganda, and they said "there is trouble in Uganda, stay there". And so she did. She then went to Goa as her brother Alex just got there.

Dad's brothers, Marcus, Felix, Victor and sister Eulalia all settled in the U.K. Uncle Peter was also there for a short time with his family before he came to Uganda.

When my grandmother in Goa decided to come back to London as they did not allow her in Uganda, to be with the family, the British put her directly in a Refugee camp. For many days she was there. My aunt Rosie said that no one knew she was there. Uncle Peter used to volunteer in the camp. And to his surprise bumped into his mother! Mai Isabel said she was not supposed to be a refugee, she told them this is my son's address, but they would not listen to her.

Cressy: Yeah, we have a lot of family in the U.K, even my sister and her family settled in the U.K after some time back in India.

On Nick's trip that he went to, Barbados, he met a lot of travel agents who advised him to move to Montreal, they said St. John was too small a place for travel. And they could even offer him a job. In 1973 my second daughter was born at St. Joseph's hospital in St. John and the friends at the Kierstead Park threw a baby shower for me and a lot of my family... and a lot of my family later came to visit and to help me with the new baby. My sister-in-law Eulalia also migrated to St. John to join us and worked at Canada Trust.

Meanwhile, in Montreal, a friend by the name of Hubert asked Nick if he wanted to move to Montreal as he was leaving his job and going to Calgary and he would ask his boss to offer him the job. Nick did agree and we got ready to move our Mobile Home to Montreal. We could not afford to rent a home and have all the luxuries we were used to in the mobile home- washer, dryer, stove, fridge- we were really spoiled. We decided to move to Montreal with our mobile home. We had to have a police escort in front of our trailer when we moved to Montreal, so we had to pay \$600 from St. John to Montreal. Was cheaper than all the appliances you would have had to purchase. In Montreal we parked our mobile home in Remillard trailer park in St. Luc, P.Q which was quite a way from downtown Montreal where we worked. I also had found a job at RBC and the babies were at the nursery home in Verdun, since we could not find anything closer. I worked for two years and then had my daughter Olivia. Six months after she was born, we moved to a house. Nick was at that time working as a travel manager for Mr. Sharma who had lot of real estate in Montreal and offered us a five-bedroom, split-level large home in Longueuil. We lived in there for 28 years in this home, till my three daughters graduated and oldest finished from McGill College and moved to Toronto where Nick always dreamt of moving. At this time, he owned an agency, "Voyages la Passage", in Place Bonaventure, where we made our livelihood. I left the Royal Bank and now I joined him and helped him in travel and some of his secretarial duties.

Evelyn: Mom, also in Montreal you guys started the QGA, which is the Quebec Goan Association.

Heather: Oh.

Evelyn: The Quebec Goan Association basically united all the Goans from the Montreal area and they had many functions together...

Cressy: Christmas parties, Christmas trees parties for the kids, Halloween, Easter, all kinds of things...Dart tournaments.

Cressy: Including the celebration of the independence of Uganda, we liked Uganda so much that we couldn't forget some of the things we celebrated back home. This club was started because we were always used to clubs in Uganda.

Heather: Right.

Cressy: Everybody had a club, in Entebbe they had a club, in Kampala they had a club, so these guys were used to having clubs, so they decided they wanted to form a club and keep everybody together. So that helped a lot mentally, because we would discuss our problems, talk to each other, learn from each other...

Evelyn: Mhmm, they did a lot to bring people together and that club still exists today, and my sister, Olivia used to be a president of the club.

Cressy: Yes, My youngest daughter, became a president recently, working for that same club.

Evelyn: Dad was part of management too

Cressy: Yes, They are all founder members of this club. When Evelyn moved to Toronto, she was living in a basement apartment and we did not like the area... so we decided to buy a home, as an investment. My second daughter also move to Toronto. We bought a home in Mississauga in 1996, when the housing market was very good.

Evelyn: One of the reasons we moved to Toronto is Montreal had a lot of French-English issues. I knew French but not as well as if I had schooled in French, so, it was hard to find good jobs after University. I moved to Toronto and then Twyla also moved.

Cressy: And there were a lot of kids who were not finding jobs in Montreal, so there were a lot of kids coming from universities and wanting a place to stay and we would rent out rooms as needed.

Evelyn: Me and my sister Twyla, went to an English elementary school and then English high school but my youngest sister was caught because there was a law that came into effect, that she had to go to French school

Cressy: Yeah, Our kids at that time were given a French education at the age of four, all-day school, and it was only given to immigrant and Anglophone kids, not the French children. The French were, in fact, envying us that we could send our kids to an all-day school when they were four. So, they said that was not fair. But then the government was trying to 'French-imize' the whole province by making us send these kids to French schools.

Evelyn: Olivia had all of her elementary in French.

Cressy: Yeah.

Evelyn: And then she went to English highschool.

Cressy: Then we sent them all to a private school, Sacred Heart School in Montreal, and we paid for their education, which was pretty expensive. The school was run by nuns and rooted in the Catholic faith. Because I had education from nuns and my husband's school was run by priests, we thought they had more discipline and structure than other schools. My husband used to drive them every morning and pick them up in the evening, it was quite a chore to let three of them go downtown.

Heather: Was it difficult to have one child in a French school?

Cressy: Yes, it was, because she's the only one who spoke all the French and whenever she brought friends over she would not allow me to talk to them.

Evelyn: She was embarrassed (laughs)

Heather: Oh. (laughs)

Cressy: She would say, "Don't talk to my friends, your French is not good!" Things like that, but in the long run it helped her—

Heather: Right.

Cressy: But in the beginning she didn't want to go to a French school because it was a complete change in teaching, they were all speaking in French and she knew only English so she rejected that and she said, "I don't want to go, I don't want to go." But then come December, she was speaking just like them.

Heather: Wow.

Cressy: [00:40:00] So later we bought a house in Mississauga when the housing market was good. Later Nick too was always wanting to move to Toronto because so many of his friends were in Toronto and French was becoming a big problem for him because when he ran the travel agency, all the documents, the income tax and government documents, came in French. And he was a very independent guy, he didn't like that he had to ask his friends to help him with the French part of the administration. He was very happy, in fact he just left me and he said, "I'm going to start an agency in Toronto, you sell the house and stay with Olivia," that was my last daughter there.

Olivia didn't want to move because her French was very good, she was getting French jobs. In fact, she came here to Toronto and the very next week she got a job. But then unfortunately things didn't work out for her and she went back. Nick opened an agency in Toronto and my daughter Olivia was the only one left behind in Montreal as she was fully bilingual. I put the house for sale and sold it, along with a lot of our furniture. It was not a good time to sell in 1996, as we did not get much for the house because that was the time there was recession in Montreal, everybody was moving out, nobody was happy, there were no jobs.

We had bought our house for thirty-five thousand in 1975 and sold it in 1996 for one hundred and seventeen thousand, which was not very much really, during those days. Evelyn married and now I have three grandchildren. Nick passed away in 2019 in our Meadowvale house, which he bought next to my daughter Evelyn so that we could help her with the children. I'm happy I moved to Canada as I get a pension now and a widow's pension and I have been able to survive on it.

Evelyn: It's okay, Mom, take your time.

Cressy: My daughters all have good jobs and are well-settled and I'm happy about that. Being in Canada I could offer my kids a better education, and a lifestyle that I didn't have—and a better lifestyle than I had in India. We are grateful to the Canadian government and all the people that helped us along the way.

Heather: Oh, that's okay, thank you so much, I really appreciate you sharing with me, that was great. Do you mind if I ask you a couple questions?

Cressy: Sure.

Heather: I was just wondering about, if you don't mind, and also if you don't want to ask any questions that's totally fine, you can let me know, but you mentioned when you were talking about the passports, the Portuguese passport and you also mentioned earlier being, I think your husband and your daughter being stateless?

Cressy: Yeah.

Heather: For that process did you retain those passports and have them stamped or did they get rid of them?

Cressy: No, we had to—the two of them, in fact I missed out a little bit in there. My husband had a Ugandan passport, my daughter was never given a passport because she was born there, we didn't apply for it and they never gave it to us. But my husband had a passport and they had to stand in a line, sleeping in the streets, to see if that was recognized by the Uganda government.

Heather: Right.

Cressy: They had to stand in a line and get rejected, saying that they are not black, that they cannot have a passport.

We couldn't have a Ugandan passport because they were Indians, not black. And another thing I forgot to tell you is when we were leaving Uganda, the Canadian government needed passports for us to come to Canada. I fortunately had an Indian passport, I didn't have a Ugandan passport. When I saw the situation, I went to the Indian government and I said, "Look, my husband is thrown out of Uganda and my daughter too, and they don't have passports, what can you do to help them? I'm an Indian citizen and I'm married, this is my daughter." They said, "Oh, we can help you, we can give you a travel document for your husband just to travel to Canada." And they said we can put Evelyn on my passport only for the purpose of travel. So that helped me a little bit, so we did those things and we were able to take the flight to Canada.

Heather: Okay. Wow.

Cressy: Anything else that I have missed out?

Evelyn: We had Portuguese passports though.

Cressy: Yeah, Nick had an expired Portuguese—not you Evelyn, you didn't.

Evelyn: I have one now.

Cressy: Now you have because Nick got it for you. But at that time Nick had an expired Portuguese passport which he had when she was seven years old. When he was in St. John he approached the Portuguese consulate and said, "See, I have this passport," they said, "No problem, we can renew it for you." After so many years!

Heather: Wow.

Cressy: Like maybe it was thirty years and he was seven and he came around when he was, what, twenty-eight, twenty-nine? They renewed it for him and then he told them, "I have a daughter who is also stateless and we came from Uganda," so he says, "No problem, I can issue her a passport too." She's lucky she has a Portuguese passport, an old Portuguese passport, maybe you can even renew it if you want? If Canada allows you dual citizenship, I don't know. So that was a lot of anxiety for us.

Heather: Yeah, absolutely. And you mentioned when you went to Halifax and when you went to Quebec, you mentioned the community you had at your hotel and then your community you had in Montreal, but I was wondering about the period you went to St. John, did you have a community of people from Uganda or people that you knew at all?

Cressy: No that was a little bit hard for us-

Heather: Yeah.

Cressy: -being in St. John New Brunswick because we had no community of our own.

Heather: Right.

Cressy: No Goans at all for two years. But then I had my Matron of Honour at my wedding who was living in Amherst, Nova Scotia.

Heather: Okay.

Cressy: Amherst, Nova Scotia was about a hundred and fifty miles away from St. John, so she used to come and visit me on the weekends and she also had babies about the same age as mine, so we would hang out together, she would come and spend weekends with me, and then we would go to Amherst. That was the only contact with my community. But I didn't miss them that much because I found the people in St. John, New Brunswick were *so* friendly, they were almost like people from back home in India because, if I needed anything, they would help me, they would look after my kids. They would meet up with me and we would have coffee together and they would talk about our problems and stuff like that. I found the people in St. John were very nice. In fact, I cried when I had to leave them because I thought they helped me adjust-

Evelyn: Mhmm.

Cressy: -to the Canadian lifestyle and they were very close and they had a shower party for me—in fact, I don't know why I don't keep in touch with them. I should have kept all their telephone numbers-

Evelyn: You can probably find them.

Cressy: --talk to them and tell them how much they helped, because the people from Nick's office, J.D. Allingham Travel, they helped Nick a lot, he's hanging out with them in the evening, have drinks, discuss his problems, and sometimes I was alone with Evelyn at home and I would be [00:50:00] mad with him because he would hang around with his friends and not come home because he needed some counselling I think too, because, men don't tell you all their problems, so, it's-

Evelyn: And that's how you got Twyla's name, right? Someone...

Cressy: Yeah, in fact, my second daughter's name is Twyla, T-w-y-l-a, I don't know if you have heard that name before?

Heather: On a show recently, there was someone named Twyla, but I don't know anyone in person with the name Twyla.

Cressy: (laughs) So my husband and I like this name so much, and this girl who was working with him had this name, so we decided we'd give her the name, but we wouldn't call her Twyla because we didn't want her to know we had taken her name in case she didn't like it, whatever reason. We had Twyla named her Marilyn Twyla Joanne, so we called her Marilyn until we were in St. John, and then when we came to Montreal we changed to Twyla which was not really good because whenever she went for her swimming classes, the French people used to say to her, "Tu es la! Tu es la!" (Heather laughs) That means, "You there!" in French, do you know French a little bit?

Heather: Yeah, just very slightly.

Cressy: Yeah.

Heather: Yeah.

Cressy: Yeah. They say, "You there!" They say, "Tu es la! Tu es la!" So, they used to make fun of her.

Heather: Yeah. Great, I think you covered most of the questions, I was taking notes as you were talking, just in case I wanted to follow up on anything, but-

Cressy: Okay.

Heather: Is there anything else you, wanted to share before we wrap up? I think that's all of my questions, but is there anything we missed or anything you'd like to revisit?

Evelyn: My dad told us a story about his boss, who was taken by the army as he was the manager of the travel agency. He was taken at the airport after coming back from a trip to settle his family in London. The army guy took him and put him in the trunk of his Mercedes and drove him to Makindye, so the same place Dad was taken.

Cressy: Yes, Makindye was a very dangerous place to be, they have killed a lot of people and done a lot of things and I know my husband must have been tortured, mentally, saying, "we're gonna kill you, you give us, whatever!" They accused him of a lot of things. And in those three hours that he was there, we were really, really, very nervous being at home, knowing that he was there. We contacted a lot of police officers and army officers. To let us know if they knew what was happening in that prison. It was a really hard time for us.

Heather: Yeah.

Evelyn: On the way he said the rosary and prayed, the army then presented him to a chief there and my dad's boss gave a thirty-minute speech as to how he brought tourists to Uganda, he was speaking for his life, the army brought the travel agents in as they thought they were smuggling money out of the country. After his speech trying to convince the chief, my dad's boss stood there and was shocked when the generals came up to him and shook his hand and allowed him to go. When Dad was also taken to Makindye, he was also questioned about sending money out of the country, although he never did, he admitted to doing it and made him sign a document saying

so. Dad was let go but needed to bring back money for his life. Dad said that they would have never let him go if his boss never did what he did.

Cressy: My husband was studying at the Kisubi college-

Heather: Okay.

Cressy: -which is on the way to Entebbe, which is on the way to the airport. At that college they have a lot of Christian brothers, they have their Christian brother seminary somewhere in Montreal, and there were a lot of Christian brothers running that Kisubi College, they were all Canadian.

Heather: Okay.

Cressy: Being Canadian, Nick approached them including Brother Andre and Brother James, he said, "look this is what's happening to me there, they've asked me for a ransom and I have to leave tomorrow." I think the Christian brothers actually contacted the Canadian Immigration team that was doing all the interviews and asked them to hasten the process for Nick. They were asking him, "Would you like to go today, I can send you today, but you will not be able to take your wife and your daughter," he says, "No, no, no, I have to go together." He says, "Okay, we'll send you tomorrow." And the next day he fled for his life.

Heather: Right.

Evelyn: Dad also says that another friend who was taken to Makindye and allowed to leave was demeaned by the army there, dancing on tables while the army men ate meals, eventually leaving with ransom, but never fully recovering mentally from the experiences there. Dad was really one of the lucky ones.

Cressy: I think he was very lucky. Because I remember staying at home and praying with Evelyn in my arms. And another thing was that I was at Auntie Rosie's house which was a government house. And my brother-in-law says you'd better not stay in that government house because if they know, for some reason they're following you, they'll say, "What are you doing in a government house, you're not eligible for this house?" And my sister-in law had just left that day to come to Canada, her papers were processed before us. The family came and they picked me and Evelyn up from Auntie Rosie's house and they took me to Felix's house while he was still in prison for this three-hour interview. I went and I stayed with his older brother Felix who had five siblings and it was a house full, but they were very nice to accommodate me and Evelyn and Nick was really scared. He used to walk around with the rosary around his neck which I never saw him do in all his life. He was so scared.

Heather: Mhmm.

Cressy: And we are very, very Catholic in our beliefs, so everyday he used to have this Rosary and I used to say, "why is he doing this? Maybe he's really in a big trouble and..." because they were really harassing a lot of travel agents and he was scared that he was going to be one of them and it did happen that they took him, right?



Heather: Right. And I don't know if you mentioned it, but I'm just going to ask, just in case we missed it, but was there any time that you were contemplating going to another country, or was Canada what you were-

Cressy: I did, when my husband said we have to leave, I did say to him, "Can we go to Australia? It's much warmer there!" (laughs) But that is because I have arthritis and I can't stand the cold. That is the only time I said, "yes I would like..." But I was a bit depressed because when I was having my second baby, you go through a depression, and I used to hang around the windows and see the snow falling in St. John, New Brunswick, it used to depress me a lot and I used to say to him, "Why did you bring me here? We could have gone to India!" (Heather and Cressy laugh) But really in the heart of hearts I don't think I wanted to go to India because it was going a step backward instead of forward, right?

Heather: Right.

Evelyn: But Dad didn't like Australia, right?

Cressy: Ahh...

Evelyn: At that time?

Cressy: I don't know about that. But recently we went to Australia and it was much warmer there, but its too warm, really, it's very hot for me, I get my hot flashes at this age, and I really went there and I was very, very hot, I was running to the malls to stay cool. I think this weather is more tolerable. I go away to warmer places just to get away from the winter.

Evelyn: The thing is Mom has such a huge Goan community here in Toronto that she hangs around them. Every time I call her [00:60:00] she's never home, she's always hanging around her friends and-

Evelyn: They've been through this for over fifty years. A lot of social...

Cressy: Lot of social. Now in this community right now we have our own Goan club in Toronto, which is just opened in September, right? September last year?

Evelyn: All these years they had events and celebrations, and everything.

Cressy: And they would book places to have the events. Now they actually have a club which can accommodate about two hundred people-

Heather: Wow.

Cressy: Although the community is more than that, when they have an occasion, they have about two thousand people.

Heather: Wow.

Cressy: For their New Year's Dance. And not only that, for their New Year's Dance and they have a hall just for the retirees and another one just for the younger crowd and another one just for the middle thirties-forties group.

Heather: Right.

Cressy: They have different kinds of music for the different groups. And it's very interesting how they cater for everybody being such a big community in Toronto.

Heather: Yeah.

Cressy: Every Wednesday I'm invited to this club where you pay Ten dollars, you get a meal, and then they have line dancing, they have a Zumba class, play cards, Carom and billiards etc.

Heather: Wow.

Cressy: I didn't go yesterday, but I could have gone and there are different people catering, all kinds of food, so it's a lot of social life for a retired person like me, because we have a lot of retirees here. We have a retirees club and on Saturdays we say the rosary with the retiree club, it's a very interesting life, if you're retired. Good strong community.

Heather: Mhmm. Sounds really interesting. Lots of activities.

Cressy: Yeah.

I do want to say that I'm very grateful to the Canadian government for helping me raise my kids in a way that I never could have raised them back home.

Cressy: Yeah. They said that Trudeau was the one... Who opened up immigration...

It was said that the Aga Khan approached... the Aga Khan is the leader of the Ismaili community.

Heather: Right.

Evelyn: That the Aga Khan approached Trudeau to let their people come in, they were struggling in Africa, they were struggling in Uganda, to open Canada to them

Cressy: And then he couldn't just let them come here, he let the rest come.

Evelyn: All the Asians.

Cressy: Yeah, the Asians in Uganda were very talented, very educated. My uncle, Jose Marie Azevedo (M.B.E) had a noted position, he was an M.B.E meant he was a Member of the Order of the British Empire. It was a big honour. An MBE is an appointment to the Order of the British Empire. This honours system was established by King George during World War One in 1917 to honour the efforts of civilians and servicemen in non-combat roles.

He was heavily involved in the Church and conducted the choir. He was commonly known as Pope Azavedo in Entebbe. His wife, Maravilha, was my godmother. Some of my friends say she was a strict teacher.

They brought my sister, Theresa, after university and my mother, (Clementine Mary-Ann Baptista) her sister, (Balbina)'s son, and Joaquim D'Mello to Africa to make a better living.

My sister was qualified as a teacher. They were all qualified people brought to Uganda to run the government to run the schools, so it was a very talented lot of people that came to Uganda to live and work.

Evelyn: Prior to the new Indians coming, there were so many Goans in Uganda and Kenya because the British brought them from India to build the railroads. Dad's father, Raphael, used to work at a hotel in Entebbe as a Maitre D. Dad's mother, Maria Isabella was amazing at sewing, cooking and baking. She also worked as a telephone operator at East African Airways. Her father (Domingo Desouza) was a baker in Kampala.

Cressy: Yeah.

Evelyn: They lived in Entebbe where they brought up their children. The community was so close, and everyone helped each other in child raising.

Cressy: Only in the early years Nick was sent to Goa because they didn't have proper education in the nineteen forties, they didn't have enough of teachers and professionals to teach. And the schools were not very well equipped so... it was normal for the parents to send their kids to India because education was very good there-

Heather: Right.

Cressy: In India. They send them there and then my husband must have had a hard time because his mother and father were in Uganda and he was sent there to live with his uncle Timothy (D'Mello), and uncle Alex (DeSouza) to go to boarding schools. Which was very hard for a young seven-year-old to be by themselves, right? He was born in 1942.

Evelyn: Yeah.

Cressy: They became really tough being in that environment.

Evelyn: He had his cousins, he had his brother...

Cressy: He had his uncles there who were supervising him... but they were very naughty, he and his brother Arthur (Heather and Cressy laugh) very naughty. It was Arthur who came to the airport, I told you.

Heather: Oh right.

Cressy: Arthur helped us, they were both always up to tricks, very, very naughty kids. So, they asked their parents to come and take them back, the uncles couldn't handle them. But they got quite a lot of education, being in boarding schools in Goa. And then the community in Entebbe helped. Where Nick stayed with the Nazareth family. They treated him like a brother. It was such a strong community we had.

Evelyn: My dad's eldest brother Felix, worked for Uganda Parks

Cressy: Mhmm.

Evelyn: And he brought home a cheetah a baby one day. I believe, they looked after this baby cheetah because the Mom was killed by poachers, so they had a pet as a cheetah, for I don't know how long. They used to bottle feed the cheetah with a baby bottle, but when chickens started to disappear in other houses (Heather and Evelyn laugh) they had to get rid of the cheetah, put her in the zoo. I believe after 3 to 4 months the animal instincts took over, my aunt Rosie had told me. But it was cute.

Cressy: There's lots of people that go to Africa and they think that as soon as they arrive they'll see a lot of animals because everybody says there's lots of wildlife in Uganda. But that's not so, you only see them in the...Parks.

Heather: Right.

Cressy: In the zoos and the parks. Because when you talk about Africa, you talk about all these animals all over the place, and... that's not true. But Evelyn saw a lot of monkeys when you went there.

Evelyn: A lot of monkeys, yeah. (Cressy laughs)

Cressy: The monkeys were all in the park and eating her bananas, right? You gave them the bananas.

Evelyn: Mhmm. Mom and Dad went back I think... what year, 1996?

Cressy: Yes, that was another thing I should have mentioned, but I didn't want to make it too long. You see when we were married for 25 years, Nick wanted to go back to Uganda and he just... bought these tickets without telling me and on our 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, he says, "Oh here are two tickets, we're going to Uganda," and I said, "What? I don't want to go to Uganda, why would I want to get all those memories back?" It was really, really sad. And I remember him saying to Evelyn, "This is the country that was going to kill me." Finally, when he was leaving, he was really happy.

Heather: Mhmm.

Cressy: But when we went to Uganda, Arthur was in Uganda. He had established himself so well in Uganda after 25 years that he was associating himself with all the ministers and the prime ministers and permanent secretaries. He used to get a chef, a qualified cook and take them to these parties and he would get the whole meal cooked by this cook for their parties. So, he was very popular there-

Heather: Right.

Cressy: He would organize all their parties, so they liked him a lot and there was a guy by the name of Sudir Kawra, he had a boat club and Arthur used to help him take care of it and Arthur used to help him a lot to organize weddings and big parties in the place and to make money taking the tourist bird watching and fishing, giving him ideas of how to make money

Heather: Oh, wow.

Cressy: The Management were very happy with Arthur and gave him a lot of perks and free accommodation for his family.

Heather: Wow.

Cressy: Arthur did a lot for Uganda, to build it.

Evelyn: Mhmm, and then your image of Uganda after...

Cressy: Then when I went to Uganda, I changed my whole picture of Uganda. I found that it had improved, the lifestyle was different, there were nice restaurants, the place was more populated, we used to come home for lunch and have a siesta everyday in the 70's. But when I went in, when was it?

Evelyn: '96.

Cressy: '96. In '96 when I went, I thought the whole thing was changed. My niece Isabelle told me, "Auntie Cressy, we cannot come for lunch anymore because there's so much traffic, the people going in and out," everyone has a car because they had recycled cars from Dubai brought into Uganda. Everybody could afford a car. There's a lot of traffic going up and down during lunch time, she says, "Auntie Cressy, we have to take our sandwiches now to work, we cannot just..." We were very privileged to be able to [00:70:00] go home for a hot meal and even rest about 15-20 minutes before we came back to work because the places of work were not very far and there was not much traffic.

Evelyn: Because I had never been there before, I really liked it, the weather was really perfect, every single day, oh my god.

Cressy: Yes! That's true, that's true. (Heather laughs) The weather when we went first in 1996 was perfect. Because I remember Arthur keeping a fan in the bedroom and we never used it even once.

Heather: Wow.

Cressy: It was really, really perfect weather. And I said to Arthur, I said, "we've never used this fan, Arthur, its so nice in Uganda." But now my sister-in-law, I was just talking to her the other day, that the weather is changing all over the world, she says it does get very hot and muggy. It is changing because it is quite close to the equator.

Heather: Right.

Evelyn: And we went to see the mountain gorillas, do you remember?

Cressy: Mmm, yeah.

Evelyn: We went on a big hike to see the mountain gorillas.

Cressy: My husband, he liked to do everything in style. He bought us for our 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary tickets to see the gorillas in Rwanda, which is a very rare species to look at. And they were about a hundred- and fifty-dollars US per ticket to go see them.

Heather: Wow.

Cressy: He had to buy those tickets and he bought three tickets for us, and then we had these Abercrombie and Kent...Tents, luxury tents.

Which had a bed and a little washbasin for brushing your teeth and little showers and the showers like were open on the top but covered on the side. It was quite an interesting experience, really, staying in those tents. And there were meals provided, there was dining area and the meals were served in style, like the usual British way of serving meals. They had all the interesting meats and steaks and all that you could want...

Evelyn: Mhmm.

Cressy: Fish, there was a lot of Tilapia, and they even sold samosas, which is very rare in the suburbs there, remember? We were really shocked they had samosas in the places where gorillas were, because we had to drive quite a ways to go see the gorillas.

Evelyn: Yeah.

Cressy: It was at the Uganda-Rwanda border.

Heather: Okay.

Evelyn: And the people were really nice, the Ugandans themselves are very nice, they're very humble, they reminded me of Cubans, but they're very humble and very sweet and-

Cressy: They're very sweet and affectionate people.

Evelyn: They're very nice.

Cressy: In fact, the first time we went back and we told them in the stores when we were shopping, we were thrown away by Idi Amin and they were so happy that we had come back! They said, "oh, welcome back, it is nice of you to come back to see us and its not a very nice thing what happened to you all." They were actually sympathizing with us-

Heather: Right.

Cressy: About what happened. They were not in favour of what happened.

Evelyn: Mhmm.

Cressy: What was done was done only by Idi Amin and his army, not the rest of the people. They suffered a lot, with this happening because they had no food to eat. When all the Asians left, they had no food to eat.

Heather: Right.

Cressy: They were planting bananas, they had to have a banana plantation in their garden just to survive.

Evelyn: Mhmm.

Heather: Mhmm.

Evelyn: And we went back and saw your old house, right?

Cressy: We saw the old house and all the banana trees that were planted in the back. That's what they said they had to do, as there was a food shortage. The Uganda Asians had all the sugar factories and the flour, the tea and everything was produced by the Indians. When they threw the Indians out, they were really short of a lot of commodities.

Heather: Right.

Evelyn: Mhmm. I liked it so much that I was offered a job. (Cressy and Evelyn laugh)

Heather: Oh wow!

Evelyn: Remember someone said, "Oh come work with me," one of Uncle Arthur's friends

Cressy: Yeah.

Evelyn: I was actually thinking about it, as it was a very nice place.

Heather: Yeah.

Cressy: 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary he took us back and then Evelyn says, "Oh but I'm not employed, can I come with you?" And she was only about 21 I think then?

Evelyn: I must have been 25, right? Because it was 25 years?

Cressy: 25 years, yeah.

Cressy: She came with us. I remember we went to one of the Newsweek parties. There were a lot of dignitaries there, there was the Ministry of Education that I had worked for, I went and said hi to him and he says, "Why don't you come back?! You used to work for us, you used to work for the Ministry of Education! Why don't you come back? Things are better now here," and stuff like that. And then, my husband Nick, his friend said, "You know that place up there? It's vacant. We could open up a travel agency and you could work there." You remember?

Evelyn: Mhmm

Heather: Mhmm

Cressy: It's near city bar up there.

Evelyn: It's a very nice place.

Cressy: And then Arthur's boss said to her, "Why don't you stay? We can offer you a job!" Right?

Evelyn: Yeah.

Heather: Yeah.

Cressy: That was a very good experience going back after 25 years, although I didn't like the idea at first.

Evelyn: It was very emotional for them.

Heather: Sure.

Cressy: Yeah.

Evelyn: For Mom. But I really liked going and seeing where I was born and the place is really, really nice. And the people are really, really nice.

Cressy: She didn't want to come back, she wanted to stay.

Evelyn: Yeah

Cressy: When we came back, they both getting together, Nick and her, saying, "Maybe we should go back."

Evelyn: Mhmm!

Cressy: And I said no way, I don't want to go back.

Evelyn: Mhmm.

I just liked the weather. The weather was perfect.

Cressy: We were lucky, as in 2018 we went together to Uganda for the last time for a visit. My husband died in 2019. He really loved it there

Heather: Oh wow.

Heather: My last question is, you mentioned Arthur a few times, so he never left at all... or did he?

Cressy: No, he never left (except for a brief period) he thought he would stay there, but I think, his wife had been through a lot, she would be in the house and she would hear gunshots and she told us of some of the experience she had, she was really terrified with all this at that time.

Heather: Yeah, of course.

Evelyn: Mhmm.

Cressy: But she said sometimes she would take the little girl, she had a baby, for a walk, on this trail in her stroller and she would see all these army guys walking up and down, it was really scary with the little baby, with guns in their hands and stuff like that. You don't know what could happen.

Heather: Yeah.

Cressy: So, he stayed there, but at the risk of his life.



Today my sister in law, her daughter and family live in Kampala not far from each other. They have good jobs and visit us often.

Evelyn: Mhmm.

I think that's it for us.

Cressy: I think that's pretty much everything, we're very grateful to the Canadian government for allowing us to migrate here and helping us settle down. They helped us a lot.

Heather: Great. Awesome. That's all I had, but thank you so much for meeting with me.

Cressy: Thank you so much!

[End]