

**The Ugandan Asian Archive Oral History Project**  
An Oral History with Vinay Dattani

Archives and Research Collections  
Carleton University Library  
2016

An Oral History with Vinay Dattani  
*The Ugandan Asian Archive Oral History Project*  
Archives and Research Collections, Carleton University Library

Narrator: Vinay Dattani  
Researcher: Shezan Muhammedi  
Date: July 29, 2015  
Session #: 1/1  
Length: 65 minutes  
Location: Calgary, Alberta

**Abstract:**

Mr. Dattani and his entire family was resettled in Canada in the fall of 1972. His grandparents originally migrated from the Indian subcontinent in the early 1900s and thus his siblings were second generation Ugandans.

He reflects fondly on his childhood in Uganda recalling his family's roots in the country. He was educated in India as a mechanical engineer. He returned in 1967 to work the Uganda Sugar Factory in Lugazi before being employed as an engineer for Shell. In 1972 Mr. Dattani applied to be resettled in Canada along with his wife and immediate family.

Currently, Mr. Dattani is retired after a long career with the Alberta Wheat Pool. He became recertified as an engineer in Canada and has embraced his passion for film by volunteering as a videographer for many years.

This oral history was conducted Mr. Dattani's home in Calgary, Alberta.

Shezan Muhammedi: "This is an oral history being done on July 29th and Mr. Dattani you can tell me about yeah your family's history in Uganda, how you guys ended up there."

Vinay Dattani: "So my grandparents migrated to East Africa, I don't know when the exact year, which year they came to. But my mother is born in Uganda, 1927. That means my parents must be there for, her parents must be there before that. So I'm guessing 1900s is probably when they came. And then they settled in a, my grandfather settled in a place called Kamuli in Uganda and he passed away in 1936. So long time before I was born. So I've never met him. My dad got married in 1942 I believe. I was born in 1945, so I had a sister before me, she passed away. And then we grew up in Kampala, Uganda. At some point, he migrated from Kamuli to Kampala and the story that he tells us of... advised us that, he worked for four years for somebody. Salary in those days was 1500 shillings a year. And he got some capital, no, no, I think it was less than that, it was 300 shillings a year but then four years between him and my uncle, they collected 1500 shillings or 2000 shillings and started a shop of their own in 1940. A grocery store and then from '40 to '72 he ran the store. So my uncle and my father. While they were running the store the family started to grow so we became five brothers and one sister. So we are all in Canada. My sister is in US. All the five brothers are in Calgary."

Shezan: "All 5? Oh wow!"

Vinay: "My mother is in Calgary too. So then what happened is in '72 when Idi Amin asked us to leave we came to Calgary. And what had happened was while I was young at the age of twelve, went to India to study. So I stayed five years in a boarding school in Dehradun which is North India. They don't speak Gujarati there, there's no Gujaratis there. And then after that in 1961, December, I finished my senior Cambridge or high school. It used to be senior Cambridge at that time in India too, in some of the boarding schools."

Shezan: "Yeah because it was still the British system."

Vinay: "The British system and the school I stayed in was a Catholic school. Then I came back to Uganda and wanted to be an accountant. So to be an accountant, I wanted to go to England but my dad said, "I can't afford to send you to England." He said, "I can send you back to India because in India the cost is very little, 250 rupees a month." Which is in today's dollars terms it is like five dollars, today's terms. So

to do accounting in India you had to do [Bachelors of Commerce] and then chartered accountancy which takes eight years and so the career selection becomes easy. I don't want to spend eight years doing accounting, so I went into science and I did very well in science and then I applied for an engineering entrance exam. Over there what you had to do was you had to appear in exams. Everybody applies, and in my college there were 240 seats, 1500 applied. The first sixty go into mechanical engineering, the next sixty go into electrical engineering, the balance 120 go into civil engineering. So you can write you want to be mechanical, electrical, civil, but it doesn't matter. First you need to get into the 240 to get accepted. If you are not in the top 240 then it doesn't matter what you write. So I was gonna write electrical engineering said why don't you write mechanical. You may get civil, but if you write civil and you get civil then you can't change into mechanical. The first 60 go into mechanical that's the hierarchy, the next 60 go into electrical and the balance go into civil. So I wrote mechanical and I aced the exam. I was number one in the entrance so I had a choice, I could go into either. I stayed in, two years of courses are the same. So after two years nobody from mechanical will go into electrical or civil. You stay in mechanical; mechanical is considered a little higher. In four years I graduated in mechanical engineering in 1967."

Shezan: "In India?"

Vinay: "In India, and then came to Uganda. My first job was with sugar factory. Uganda sugar factory, there's two sugar factories there, Uganda sugar factory and Madhvani sugar factory in Kakira. So most engineers would either go to this one or that one. Or they go to water board or other places in the government. I worked there two and a half years and then I switched to Shell because the pay was much higher. I was an engineer for Shell for two and a half years until Idi Amin asked us to leave. He didn't ask me to leave, I was a Uganda citizen because my mother is born there I am born there, so birth right. Initially I was gonna stay so within ten days they said go and get your passports checked. So I went on the second day and got it checked and I was legal to stay. But then with everybody leaving, I thought I would leave too. So in the morning when I was going to work, I passed by the British embassy and the Canadian embassy just opened up, and I hate lineups. If there's a big lineup, I would not like to stand in the lineup. The Canadian embassy had a very small line, there was about ten people standing in line. It was about ten to eight in the morning. So I asked what the line was all about and they said, "It's to go to Canada." So I said, so few people... I stood in line, little knowing that my work started at eight the office opens at eight-thirty, I thought it opened at eight. So by eight o'clock, more people started to come and

by eight-thirty the line was long. Now I was not going to get out of the line and stayed. So I stayed and they took my interview and they said, "Your qualifications for engineering are not recognized in Canada, will you do anything else?" I said, "I'll take any job, it doesn't really matter. I can do anything you want me to do, I'll do." So he took my interview and I got the right points and they said, "Is your wife outside?" I said, "Yeah." "You've got your photographs with you?" I said, "Yeah." I went and got my wife from home, she wasn't outside. I came back and started standing in line and I told the person standing there that I've already got my visa, he wants to see my wife so I went to get her from the car. Then the government of Canada sent planes, ten planes actually to get all the people that are from Uganda as refugees. So I left my house, my car, all the furniture everything. We were allowed to bring sixty kilos of luggage, so I had a daughter of three months old. So twenty kilos for me, twenty for my wife, and twenty for my daughter. So we brought sixty kilos of clothing, left everything else the way it is. My car, I gave my keys to my operations manager at Shell and my secretary wanted to buy the car for 5,000 shillings, so I said, "It doesn't matter you give the money to the operations manager, I'm leaving." And I said, "We'll figure out how to get the money from there," because my uncle was still in Uganda. He became stateless, so when he went to get his passport OK'd, they took it away and said, "This is fraudulent, not fraudulent, but this is not a legal document because you applied it not according to the rules." Do you want me to get into that too?"

Shezan: "Yeah, yeah sure, of course."

Vinay: "So what happened is he was a British subject and the government said within two years you should apply for Ugandan citizenship. If you get your citizenship, you cannot be citizens of two countries, you must revoke your other citizenship. So he applied for Ugandan citizenship, the day he got it, he applied to the British to revoke his British citizenship which was within the two year time period. There was so much work in British embassy that they could not attend to his letter of revocation until after the two years were up. So after the two years up, they wrote him a letter because they don't know that there's a two year time period or anything. The British government they get all these letters and they go one by one by one. By the time they got to his case and revoked his citizenship, he had two citizenships within that two year period. Because he didn't apply right away, because it was at the tail end. So they said, "On this day is the two years up, we see here that you are citizen of Britain too, and Ugandan citizen too, so it is not valid. So we will accept the British one and take away the Ugandan one." Meanwhile British had already taken away. He went to the British and the British said, "This is not a

game” [laughter]. You've revoked it once, we can't give it back to you, now it's our choice, so they didn't give it to him. Whereas Uganda cancelled it on a technicality basically. He became stateless, he was gonna be there. So I said to my operation manager, I said, “Give it to my uncle,” which he did actually. But you couldn't take the money out of the country anyway, so we didn't bring any money with us. We had no cash and the Canadian government sent planes over and they said, “When do you want to go?” We said – I got a visa on Tuesday, Wednesday was the first flight, Saturday was the next flight – I said, “Wednesday was too soon, but Saturday we can leave.” So we left on Saturday. Those that left on Wednesday, when the bus was taking them to Entebbe, everybody got robbed on the way to Entebbe they had police check points, army checkpoints actually. But on Saturday we had escorts because of the incident that had happened on Wednesday. We were lucky that we could get to the airport and leave without any hassle. And the plane was not full, I think the passengers, there was a 200 seater plane or 250. We were only seventy in the second plane. So we came and landed at Montreal. And 1972, 30th September, had done a fantastic job. They gave us accommodation in the barracks and somebody came into our room to do customs. We didn't understand lying or anything like that. At midnight they had Indian food. They had hired a cook or something like that. We had nice Indian food, we were really surprised and the next morning was the interview to see where I was going to settle.”

[Interruption]

Vinay: “So then, where was I, oh yeah they were taking our interview and they said, Where do you want to go?” I said, “Winnipeg.” And they said, “Why?” I said, “I have a friend that lives in Winnipeg, who is a friend of a friend.” There was a R., Sikh gentlemen who used to work in Kakira. He was a friend of a friend of mine who used to work in Kakira. I had his address, I said, “I've got his address.” So he said, “You used to work at Shell, do you want a job or do you want to see your friend?” I said, “Job.” He says, “You go to Alberta because Alberta has got a lot of oil, so you'll get a job easily there. Winnipeg you won't get a job in your field.” So I said, “Alright, we'll go to Calgary.” So they set it up so that I came to Calgary. In Calgary what they had done is that they had applied and announced at the University of Calgary and other places that refugees are coming, can somebody help them out? So there was a British couple D. H. and G. H., they had volunteered. So when I came to the airport, the person from the [Department of Manpower and Immigration] that came to receive me made a phone call and said, “I've got a couple with a daughter can I send them to your house?” And they said yes. I went to 28 and 4th Avenue Northwest, I had a room in the basement, so I spent two weeks with them.

Meanwhile, started to apply for jobs and '72 there was a recession here, there was no jobs. Then after two weeks I went to Manpower again and I said, "How long am I supposed to stay there?" He said, "Well, get an apartment, we'll pay maximum 150 dollars a month. Get a furnished apartment so you don't have to worry about furniture." I got an apartment, a one bedroom apartment for 150 dollars so me my wife and my daughter moved in. And the job was difficult, six weeks it took to find a job. This was at ATCO, at two eighty-five an hour as a store keeper. So I took it anyway, I said I needed some cash. Meanwhile to survive here because I came with no money. Manpower was giving us fifteen dollars per week for groceries. My wife would get fifteen, I would get fifteen and my daughter would get seven fifty, so thirty seven fifty a week plus the \$150 for the rental. So we managed with that.

The minute I got a job, I went back and I said I found a job. So I don't need the money anymore because we were not used to welfare or somebody giving us money, it would be not right to take money in fact. So they stopped giving the money. We managed with the salary I was making. The next week, I had applied at Canadian Pacific [CP] rail for an engineering position, I got a call, "Can you come?" I said, "Sure." So I went down there and they say, "We've got a new car shop opening up here in Ogden. We have a position of labourer" [laughter]. I said, "You know what position I applied for?" They said, "Yeah I know, you can apply for the CEO position but I have a job that is a labourer job, you told me a story so I called you. If you want take it, if you don't want it, I've got somebody else on the list. I'll go through my list. If you want it, it's yours." I said, "How much does it pay?" Two ninety-six an hour so I figured it out, eleven cents more an hour is seventeen dollars more a month. And I gave notice over there and I went to CP rail as a labourer and this is November 24th, my first day to start at CP rail. So 30th September I landed. First October I basically came to Calgary. On the fifteenth or seventeenth of November I got the job with ATCO, I worked a week, two weeks and I quit and I went to, since then I haven't looked back. Since then, I have never gone on unemployment insurance, all my life here, never applied even once for [inaudible]. And then six weeks later I get a promotion from labourer to helper. Pay increase was from two ninety-six an hour to three twenty-nine and then I, six weeks later I got a training carman's position. Three ninety-six an hour and then I got really happy because a dollar increase an hour is seventy three dollars a month. I worked there for three years and then I built up seniority so once day I get a, a union guy comes and asks, "Vinay do you want to go welding and make some more money?" I said, "I don't know how to weld, even though I'm an engineer but I don't know how to weld." And he said, "We'll teach you but do you want to?" I said, "Sure."

I learned how to weld, six months later I said, "I would like to take my exam for the ticket." So I am a ticketed welder. And the foreman said, "The rule is you must work one year before you can write the exam, you need one year experience." So I said, okay, the next week I go and bug him again. I said, "Check me out, I know how to weld, I'm really good, I need to write the exam. If you recommend then only I can write otherwise I can't." After bugging him for a couple of more days he agreed. And I wrote my test, you have to do, weld four plates in four different positions and they sent it to Montreal for checking. And three of the plates passed and the results come to him first not me. So one evening when I go down to work, he comes I got really excited. He said, "Hey you did really well you did three plates, you only failed in one." So he said, "Show me how you are welding because he himself was a welder. He said, "Where are you going wrong?" Because nobody really taught me. The teaching part was that they put you in a shack and they put these screens around you and said this is how you weld and the guy takes off. Then you're on your own because the rod sticks and put it out and slowly, slowly you pick it up and say how he has done. So he was really excited and he showed me. When you weld you do it like this and then you wait here for a little while because I'm doing horizontal welding where it drops off if it's too hot. So he said, "Your machine is too hot," so we fixed that. So he said, "All you have to do is one more plate." So the next Saturday or Friday, I did the plate, send it off, and got my ticket.

So I worked one year as a welder at CP rail. Then there was a union negotiation for wages and this always happens at negotiation time that the company threatens to lay off workers. They laid off a lot of people but I was a welder and seniority so people below me went so I could bump somebody. So I bumped and came down to level that I was a helper. So you take a cut in pay and they send you to work as an oiler. You have to oil the train when the train comes from Vancouver. Terrible job, terrible job. There's no brains at all, it just hard labour. So it's that time that I decided that maybe I should do something else. So to get into engineering you had to write exams and you had to get registered with APEGA. Meanwhile I took a course at SATE mechanical drafting, that's easier to get into I thought. So I went to the class and the guy says, "You have drafted before." I said, "Yeah, I'm an engineer but I need this little certificate saying that I'm a draftsman." He said, "You don't belong in this class go to the next class." He said that I paid the fees, he said, "It's one lesson it doesn't matter, I will write you a letter just go on to the next class because you don't belong here." So I went to the next class and I told the instructor that all I need is an A. He gave me a B on one of my drawings and I said, "Why did I get a B, I need an A? What do I do to get an A?" He said, "These are the parameters." From there on I got A's in all of them [laughter].

So I got my mechanical drafting ticket. And there was a vacancy at Alberta Wheatpool. So now instead, when I went to the interview I took my six drawings that I had done and I sat down and I said I'm a mechanical draftsman, these are my drawings and this is what I can do. Six of us applied but apparently the guy liked my work probably, he hired me. I had to take a cut in pay. Twenty dollars less in pay to leave my welding job to come to drafting job. I stayed there twenty-six years. Meanwhile in 1975 I started studying for engineering exams. I had to write four exams and I passed all of them and in 1978 I got my registration with APEGA. Then I went to my company and said, "I am a draftsman but now that I've got my engineering qualifications, I don't mind doing the same work but my designation has to change." So the manager said, "Already we'll call you a junior engineer." I said, "Alright I don't mind junior is fine, but next year I will come back and say I want to be a senior engineer. So I said if we are going to change it why don't we do it properly the first time." They said, "What do you want to be called?" We had an engineer already in the company, I said "Why don't you call me an assistant engineer?"

Shezan: "Ok, yeah."

Vinay: "And reporting to the engineer and then reporting to the manager of engineering. So he said, "Okay," and I've got a decision. I got a raise in pay still doing drafting work and then I said, "What do I do now?" So I said, "The workload is increasing we need a junior draftsman." So we hired a junior draftsman, I would be the assistant engineer. He would be doing the drafting, I would do drafting if need be and slowly, slowly, engineering jobs started coming. Then basically we didn't do engineering per se because we hired consulting engineers to do design work and stuff like that, because we ourselves are two, two of us so we would manage the process but not do the work ourselves. So as time goes by you learn about the company and so in the end when I finished I was a project engineer, I was responsible for fertilizer side of the agriculture business and my pumping packages that I had set up are still being used. The buildings that I was involved in the design of the same technology is still being used. Not rocket science, it's very simple. I had a cookie cutter approach that if you have a building and if you design it instead of just building a building let's see what we need to build, what's the criteria? And then sat down with the fertilizer department and said, "How much do you want to sell in a day?" They gave me a target, they said 500 tonnes a day. They were selling twelve tonnes an hour, about 100 tonnes a day. One hundred and fifty tonnes was the max they could sell. So I said, "I can design a system that can give you 500 tonnes a day no problem, you want 600, I can do that." So we settled on 500 tonnes and

based on 500 tonnes a day you need, I said, "How long will it take you to get a product because you've gotta have a capacity of the building. So should we build a 500 tonne capacity building, then it will be empty in one day, so you need two days' supply so 1000 tonnes. But what if today you have sold and tomorrow you have sold and tomorrow the trucks are late delivering the product. What's your optimal time that if you order today, how long will it take before you get the product?" And they said twenty-four hours. I said, "You sure you'll get it in twenty-four hours?" They said, "Yeah." I said, "That means I have to allow two days of supply." So I said, "To be safe if you make three days' supply. So I said 500 tonne supply needs 1500 tonnes plant," so we built 1800 tonne plants. That became an optimum. So there's no point in making more buildings since that will cost and this will do 500 tonnes a day. The main season is ten days, fertilizer season is ten days so you can sell 5-6000 tonne plants. This will do three times inventory turnaround and then you have a fall season.

So then based on this criteria they can do the return on investment on capital and stuff like that and justify if the building is worth building. Are the sales up there? But now there's a thought process in it. By the time I left in ten years we built twenty-six buildings same plants, same machinery, same everything in each one. Had I been there we would've been building the same thing. What happens there is that when you move people around, less training required because same equipment, same thing, same rocket, same so the training becomes easier, everything is easy. Not rocket science, it's just thought process and how to get it done.

But anyway twenty-six years was 2000 and I worked there 1975 September to 2002 March. And the reason I retired – I was fifty-six I could've worked until sixty-five – is the company started merging. So we had two mergers, the first merger was with Manitoba Wheat pool and our management was in control, so my job was secure. The next merger that took place was between us with United Wheat growers and we became Agricol United and the head office went to Winnipeg. I did not want to move to Winnipeg so I asked them to let me go, they hey let me go. So since 2002, and today I'm retired. Active from engineering side, meanwhile I said I've got to do something else, so I started a computer store. I ran that for four years, I still have the company but I'm not very active now. But I still if somebody needs something done, I get it done and give them a bill. You heard the doctor say you're gonna give me a bill. I said instead of giving him one invoice every call or at the end of everything, I said, "Give me a service contract at the end of the year." I said, "It will be a small bill." That way he's happy and I'm happy. My company, it goes to my company, but for all other purposes I'm retired.

Meanwhile, survival jobs initially while working at Alberta Wheat Pool. I started driving a taxi, actually I started driving a taxi before that when I was working as a welder. We needed money so on the weekend I would drive a taxi and I kept my license until 1980. Nineteen seventy-three, I started driving until 1980 part time, off and on to supplement the income. Then I wanted to pick up other skills.

So how do you pick up a skill? I wanted to be a videographer. So you can go to SATE and take a course \$1200 is the fee. I took another route, somebody approached me and said, "We want to produce our own television show, can you help?" I said "Absolutely." So you volunteered, they don't pay you. We went to the cable studio, cable ten it used to be here. I went there and I said, "I would like to volunteer." They said, "What can you do?" I said, "Anything, I can even sweep the floor if you want to." He said, "We need somebody to type, do you type?" I said, "Yeah I got a sixty words a minute certificate." So he said, "We have a chyron machine, we need you to make slides." Suppose they are taking an interview and they want to say Shezan so the computer screen comes up there and they have your name in the right spot and then you press a button and it goes there for three seconds and you press the button again and it comes off. And there are ten interviews, then I've got ten slides ready with all the names and the right slide goes at the right time.

So one day after three, four, weeks of doing that. I told the supervisor there B., I said, "B. that gentlemen there doing the audio board. I'll do this but after I've made my slide it's just the pushing of buttons. I want to learn how to do that, can I sit with him? I'll do this too, chyron, he said sure. So then I watched what he's doing. These are the levels, this is how you plug in this. If you want this mic then you do this. So I learned, he's in charge, I'm learning. One day he didn't show up [laughter]. So B. says, "Do you have screens? I'll press buttons here for chyron, don't worry about the chyron, can you handle the audio board?" I said, "Absolutely." I said, "If I screw up he's gonna take care of it because B. will fix it because he knows what to do." Sometimes the levels were too high so I would say drop it down a touch.

I picked up audio stuff, then I told him I want to be floor director. So he goes there and say five, four, three, two, one and you go, and I had my headphones and he tells you what to do. I did that and I told him I want to be a cameraman. And now this is volunteer but it's free, I don't get paid. So he said, "Camera is hard, you have to know exactly what you're doing." I said, "You've got two cameras, so you show me what to do, I'll pick it up. If you're in trouble with me, you can always go on the other camera. Tell me what to fix and I'll fix it." He said no, so next week I bug him again and he says alright. He gives

me a little training on the camera, he said this is how you focus, this is how you do this, this is how you zoom." I go on the counter and then I was main cameraman after a while [laughter].

So I did all the positions, I did chyron, I did audio, I did camera, I did floor directing. The last job is the director's job which was that he's doing. So one day I told him, "Now I want to do your job." I said, "You stand next to me, if I screw up you take over. You have no risk basically except I sit in your chair and you stand behind me, instead of me standing behind me and you're just clicking between two buttons," because there's only two cameras but the board could handle up to eight cameras. He said okay, so he trained me on the... now the director's job is a little bit difficult. Difficult in the sense that it's not just pressing buttons camera one, camera two, you need to be thinking three steps ahead. For example, an interview is going on and you'll be going camera one, camera two, but you have to be listening saying, now that the interview is coming to a close how do you want to end it? You want to end it on one person, you want to end it on two shots, and which camera is the best camera that will give me a two shot? So you have to know that you have to end on camera one which is going to give you a better shot and camera one has to be told, and you have to be ready. You have to listen to it and audio, tell you now the interview is going to end, so now you have to tell camera two that, "Okay, I'm going to switch to camera one, you go to camera one" and you stay on and hope you are right because the scene has to stay for ten to fifteen seconds and then it ends. If it continues then you have to go back to camera one.

You have to be thinking in that, not only that but as soon as it is done, then if the next one is a dance than either you have to tape ready for a prerecorded dance, or if it is a live dance then you have to say, if you have one camera here, and one camera here and the dancer is there, I can't swing camera one there. You're going to be on my way so camera two has to be on the dancer, camera one is ending. So camera one ends and then suddenly I switch to camera two, which has got the dancer ready. Camera one is not in the way, and then camera one can move over there and then both cameras are catching the dancer. So this you have to be planning and have it all in your head. But once you do the director's job, then you are 100%."

Shezan: "Yeah cause then you know everything."

Vinay: "Then you know everything, and then you have to worry what if something goes wrong. For example, something happened to us once where the tape got stuck. So we said, We're going to show

you something, you put the tape and the tape got stuck, live is done.” I told our president, Z.P., who is the president and I said, “Can you come on and talk about sounds of India quickly?” Within thirty seconds he's ready and he's on saying sounds of India broadcasting, and he started giving his spiel. Meanwhile we are fixing the tape and as soon as the tape is done, you keep talking until I tell you not to, they will give you a signal. Two minutes later when we got the problem resolved, then we said now we're going back to the tape that we said. We had some technical difficulties, we didn't say what it was. Nobody figured it out and this is live broadcast.”

Shezan: “Oh and it was live broadcast and no one knew.”

Vinay: “No one knew, they thought this was part of the whole program. So there is a point I'm trying to make here, that volunteerism is a very important integral part of a life. Where you may thinking that you are just wasting time or giving time but you pick up skills which could benefit in real life. For example, then I started, I bought a camera. I started doing wedding videos and stuff like that and I must've done several weddings in Calgary. And in fact, my highlight was I got called to the Ismaili community had a big program of sufi music at Round Off Centre, 5000 people. I got a request that can you volunteer? I said, “Sure but it has to be within my expertise.” He says, “Yeah, we want you to take care of the video production side. So we want two big screens, you'll have three cameramen you decide what goes on,” so I'm the director basically. And then whatever you show is going to be on the two big screens, whichever camera you click is on the big screens. So I thought it was an honour because the whole 5000 people and I'm directing the video side. It was an honour to get called to do that. So then I'll talk about some other stuff and then you can put it together as you want it.”

Shezan: “Yeah, yeah, yeah of course.”

Vinay: “My daughter that was three months old she grew up here basically. Then I had another daughter in '75 and then my son was born in 1984. So they all live in Calgary and they're all well settled. My one daughter is a teacher in a school here, here name is B., another daughter is R., she's in the oil patch, she's a well planner, she lives in her own house, B. has her own house. B. has got two children, one is the daughter she's here, she's disabled but she's still my granddaughter and my son got married about three and a half years ago. He lived in Calgary and uh my second daughter R. is also got her own house and she lives on her own. She has a daughter of her own, S. So our family is well settled. My mother lives

alone, she'll be eighty-eight in August. She's got her own house, meanwhile in 1977 or 1978 I had sponsored my family, they all moved over. So my dad, mom, grandmother and my brother and sister came with the family because they were underage. The people that were over eighteen we had sponsored them before and they all came on their own.”

Shezan: “So then, they were, your dad and your grandparents they were where? They were still in Uganda, where did you sponsor them?”

Vinay: “From Uganda my dad had gone to England. So they were settled in England, but I brought them from England to here. So my dad had left Uganda in '71. My uncle had a good story too but let me finish my dad's stuff. So my dad in '78, I think in '77 he came here. And then he's bugging me that he's getting bored here, nothing to do. He wanted me to start him off with a grocery store, so we leased a small place just to keep him busy. One of my other brothers said, “I'll sacrifice and join him in business.” So he, my fourth brother M. started the store, grocery store and there were not too many grocery stores at that time in Calgary. So we ran, they ran the store for ten years and then we bought the store. Me and my brother and we said, “You guys do wholesale and we'll do retail.” Two separate entities, we'll be your sole buyers, we'll be your customer basically and so we ran the store for two and a half years and then we closed it down. We didn't even sell it we closed it down. The reason was that I was still doing the engineering job and it was too much. I was working seven days a week and we got tired so we maximum we ran two and a half years and then closed it down. So in Canada we have picked up a lot of skills. Labourer, welder, electrician, I can do the wiring of the house – in fact tomorrow I am going to my son's house to troubleshoot his wiring – plumbing, framing, videography, running a business and then latest would be the stock market. Every now and then I dabble in it, I understand it too and it's good. Yeah in fact because of that my son is a stock broker.”

Shezan: “Oh yeah? No way, I'm assuming that's your son.”

Vinay: “Yeah that's my son. Yeah he works for RBC Dominion Securities. And then when he married which was in, three and a half years ago. 2010? 2012. That time our whole family went to India to get him married. The wedding was in India and then from there my family which is me, my wife, my daughters, son-in-law, grandchildren, ten of us went to Uganda. Went to Kampala. And showed them where, when my daughter was born we went to that house actually, told her you were born here. Went

to my school, Kaliro School. Went to where I used to stay, two place where we used to stay. And we spent 11 days in Africa. Took them to Murchison Falls and so from 2002 to now, basically retired but still busy in social work, little bit of computers, little bit of everything. My uncle when he was stateless, his story is interesting too. He left Uganda with no money and because he did not have a passport.

International Red Cross came to Uganda. The three-month time limit was going to be up and they appealed to European countries to see if anybody would take refugees. So they lined up everybody up in a hall and said, stand in line. And the first fifty people go to Holland, so the first fifty families that got in the line they gave them a one-way ticket to Holland. When my uncle's turn came, his batch of fifty or one hundred families came he went to Austria. He does not speak the language. He speaks Gujarati, Lugandi, Swahili, and partial English. So him, his wife, and his daughter end up in Austria.

In fact, he tell me, he just passed away a few months ago in England. He tells me that the time he spent in Austria was the best time of his life. That's where he made the most money. No money, living in a camp, and he would not be allowed to go to England because he revoked his English passport. So what he did, that's my brother is my dad who's settled in England, so he said, "What is the problem here, can you send us some rice basmati rice?" My dad had a grocery store, and we need some agrabhati, you know the incense right? And we need some of this and some of this and some masala and all this. So my dad made a ten kilo parcel and sent it to him. Meanwhile, he told these guys that he used to have a store and he needs a job. So there was a store, I forget whether it was a pharmacy, they hired him for four hours a day and he started organizing it correctly. It was all haphazard, so the guy liked it and said oh this is better. So he would get paid there. Meanwhile this parcel came and the agrabhati, he's doing puja in the morning, other people the 100 families in the camp they smelled the incense and they said, "N. where did you get this?" So he said, "Do you want it? I can get it for you." They said sure, he said what else do you need? They said some rice and this. So the next week he got twenty kilos sent over and he started selling it. And the parcel ten kilo finished straight away because there's so many people. He told my dad every week send whatever you can. So my dad would send it.

So here he is no rent, no taxes, this is all cash. He started doing businesses and the money where do I spend the money? There's no place to spend it, it's a camp. And then he's working, he made some capital. In 18 months he stayed in the camp. Then the British government changed in England. I think Labour went out or Conservative came in, or Conservative went out. Either one, I don't know which one, either way the new government came in and said, "Reunification of families we'll be allowing." So his

children were all in England studying. On that basis he got entrance into England, he came with the capital. So he bought a first property, he bought a house with the money that he had. And that, and then he got a job with a railway company, British rail. He worked ten years in railways and he was in charge of the store, where the supply is. So then he got a package. He got redundant, so they gave you a layoff package, and then he sold his house for 60,000 pounds. He bought it for probably 8,000 sold it for twenty-two and bought another on, but bottom line is, he said, "My whole life I worked in Uganda, Austria all this, I never made so much money that I made in capital appreciation of the house." Then he went back to India and he bought land and he built a house, a big house. Now from British pounds to Indian rupees you get lots and India is much cheaper. They spent fifteen years there then he had a heart attack so then he came back to England with his kids. He's got nine kids. And he just passed away this year."

Shezan: "So then are all nine kids here?"

Vinay: "In England"

Shezan: "Oh they're all in England."

Vinay: "They're all in England. So he's the... the other good things is that while he was there, him and his daughter picked up the language. While he was there he learned German, Austrian is basically German. So he passed away at the age of ninety. Our people are survivors, no matter what, we can manage. Same thing as us coming here as refugees and today all my children have got houses, we are all settled. Cars, we never feel sad at all, you just look back at the time when we came and we had nothing. So ask away any other questions you have."

Shezan: "I guess let's see what other questions I have. So then your dad ran the store in England and then he ran the store here when he moved to Canada, so that all makes sense. And then your dad was also born in Uganda."

Vinay: "My dad was born in India but my mom was born in Uganda. She's here, she'll be eighty-eight next month, she lives alone."

Shezan: "And then, I guess so after being in Canada for so long and going back to Uganda and India. Um how would you identify yourself? Would you say you're a Canadian-Indian, Canadian-Ugandan, Ugandan-Canadian? Or just a Canadian, there's no wrong answer."

Vinay: "Canadian of East Indian decent. That's how, if somebody asked me that what I would say because out of us five brothers, my youngest brother he's born in 1962 so he'll be fifty-three roughly. He's never set foot in India. He's never set foot in India, so he was born in Uganda moved here and he's got a successful business, he's got a wholesale business. The business is still going on. He supplies all the retail goods to all the grocery stores here. So he would not say, he would say Indian, that's how we'll say it. Canadian Indian decent."

Shezan: "And sort of what does it mean for you to be a Canadian of decent, like what does that relate to?"

Vinay: "Well it's just, there's no meaning per se because nobody can figure out, they wouldn't be able to figure out that my ancestors are from there but my thought pattern is Canadian. And the difference between Canada, Uganda, if you were given a choice to live in a country the most important part is law and order. If there's no law and order, then it's difficult so for me to go back and settle in Uganda it would be very difficult. Because I don't trust and there's no trust in the law and order as much trust as we have here it's not there. Here at least they are fair or there's a perception of fairness. It is credible. So here if the robber came you call 911, you know that five minutes someone will be here. Whereas in Uganda it took take one hour, two hours. So in hindsight safety is important and we wonder sometimes that why do people still live in Kenya, Uganda where there's so much problems. Safety is not there, you could get killed and nobody gives a damn. People still live there, they don't want to leave, why? And there are two reasons that I can think of, of why, because now I've seen both sides.

I've lived in Uganda, my car got stolen, big deal. We would still be living there if the order from Idi Amin was not to leave the country because you are comfortable in the environment, that's one reason. The second reason is that you are not aware of what's going on in the other parts of the world. We never knew what Canada was like, England was like. We would compare it with India because we know India. India is difficult to live too. Law and order is there but not as good here. The trust is not there, police can be bribed [laughter]. So the people that are living there now, the only reason that they are not coming

out is that they are used to the way of life and until it impacts them personally, they don't worry about what's going on with others. They look after themselves only and when they, if they were to leave there and come here they would have to start afresh and people don't like to take risks. In fact, they may do much better here because they don't know they haven't tried but they don't want to take the risk. People are not risk takers, people who are risk takers are those who leave. But we left because we are risk takers, we left because we had no choice. That's the reasoning I can give I think."

Shezan: "And do you think that um, did it help to sort of leave Ugandan behind when you came to Canada to make peace with it?"

Vinay: "I think in hindsight that was the best thing to ever happen to us. That Idi Amin people say is a bad person, maybe bad in relative terms but from my perspective it's the best thing he ever did [laughter]. I'm glad he did what he did. At that time we were cursing him but in hindsight, best thing that has ever happened."

Shezan: "Interesting, is there anything you wanted to add?"

Vinay: "No I think that's everything, if you have questions you can ask them"

Shezan: "I think that's everything I wanted to ask you today actually. That's great, if there's anything that comes up I'll give you a call."

[End of transcript]