

Zul Rupani

Uganda Collection Oral History Project: Announcement

Zul Rupani: "My father was born in Uganda. I was born in Uganda. My mother was born in Mwanza, in Tanzania. My grandmother was born in Nairobi. My maternal and paternal grandmothers were both born in Africa. We were very early generation. To an extent, when Idi Amin expelled Ugandans, he said all British subjects. Now, eighty percent of the people down there, when Uganda became independent, either they didn't take Ugandan citizenship or they were offered Ugandan citizenship and they became Ugandan, but when Idi Amin came in, he said "All Asians of British subject, all those who are not Ugandans, expelled." So what happened to people like me? My father was born there so he was Ugandan, I'm born in Uganda, so we were treated as stateless by United Nations. Our family became stateless, but, like Yasmin said, after graduating, I worked for Diamond Trust, and two years prior to that I had been thinking of going overseas, either Canada or United States. I had applied and trouble started in Uganda, so there was a golden opportunity. I said, "Hey, I've got the papers already," and it is on the very day that Idi Amin announced, it was my wedding day.

We were sitting in a reception. A couple of friends of ours came and said, "Idi Amin has thrown out all the Indians." Because they thought those were British subjects, they're gone, not realizing that all other Ugandans who had taken citizenship, like her [Yasmin's] parents, were also included in that list. Now what do they do with people who are literal citizens? That's where the United Nations came into the picture and that's where things started rolling. They said, "Hey, wait a minute, they are stateless and they are cream of the crop. They were born there, educated there, and they don't have anywhere else to go. They can't go to India because there's no roots there. They can't go to Britain, there's no roots." So the government, the Canadian government, took all the stateless first I think. That's how I came into the picture and I already had my passport stamped with Canadian papers, Yasmin's wasn't. We were married on that day and we were on our honeymoon when the trouble started in Uganda. I was in Kenya, and then after three or four days we heard that Idi Amin has closed the border. Oh, so we started going by Tanzania by Ngorongoro [Ngorongoro Conservation Centre] and all that area, and come to the Ugandan border. When we reached the border, that's the day when Idi Amin bombed Bukoba, Tanzanian border. They closed the border there so we were stuck on both ends of the border but we managed to get out to Uganda. As soon as we came back to Kampala, we didn't even go to my house, apartments or stuff, for anything. We packed our things and the first flight, because I had papers and Yasmin was to be enrolled, we left."