

The Ugandan Asian Archive Oral History Project
An Oral History with Zul and Yasmin Rupani

Archives and Research Collections
Carleton University Library
2016

An Oral History with Zul and Yasmin Rupani
The Ugandan Asian Archive Oral History Project
Archives and Research Collections, Carleton University Library

Narrator: Zul and Yasmin Rupani
Researcher: Shezan Muhammedi
Date: June 21, 2016
Session #: 1/1
Length: 70 minutes
Location: Toronto, Ontario

Abstract:

Mr. and Mrs. Rupani were on one of the first charter flights from Uganda to Canada in 1972. Their wedding was held on the same day as Idi Amin's expulsion announcement on August 4th 1972.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Rupani recall fond memories of growing up in Uganda. From excellent schools to relaxed livelihoods, they were intent on remaining in Uganda for the rest of their lives. My and Mrs. Rupani were educated in England in business and worked as accountants in Uganda. Once they arrived in Canada, they both sought employment opportunities in their fields of expertise. Zul and Yasmin both held successful careers in accounting positions in Canada along with starting a successful retail business.

Currently, Mr. And Mrs. Rupani are retired after over 40 years of work in Canada. They recall the joys of parenthood and are currently pursuing several personal hobbies including traveling and gardening.

This oral history was conducted in Zul and Yasmin's home in Toronto.

Shezan Muhammedi: “So this just an oral history being done on June 21st and I’ll let you take it away Yasmin aunty”

Yasmin Rupani: “So I’m from Uganda and my grandparents came from India, from Gujarat in the Rajkot area. And so they came to the coast of Africa, like Dar es Salaam and then they moved inwards. I was born in Masaka, the small town right? And uh my dad, uh he used to be, you know they grow coffee and cotton in there. So he was involved in processing plants for the coffee, like they would remove the shell and coffee beans and they dried them and send them for exports. And then for cotton the local people bring cotton and they process it and then export it right? And my dad had a, you know the corn, the locals bring the corn and the make flour, so he had a factory where they make flour out of it and sell it. So the locals eat the corn flour like they use corn flour for cooking. And so it was a family business and all that and my family was well established. And then we moved, so when I was in, so I did from grade seven onwards in Kampala, in the bigger city as the business expanded we moved to Kampala right? So, uh, we went to Aga Khan school, so they Aga Khan because of our institutions, and you’re allowed to write about our institutions?”

Shezan: “Yeah, yeah, that’s fine”

Yasmin: “So because of our institutions, they had the Aga Khan school in Masaka and uh. So we had good schools but in Kampala we have more memories. We had a central institution, Aga Khan education services right? So they got American teachers and British teachers. So our principle was American, the teachers were American or British right? So I did my uh grade 13, the equivalent of A levels they used to call it right? So in the Aga Khan school and then I went to university, I went to Makerere, in Kampala we had a university called Makerere university. So I studied, I have a degree in finance in accounting and economics. I graduated, so then I uhm, after my graduation I was offered a job with an audit firm so that I would eventually do my CA [Chartered Accounting] so at that time, we didn’t, I was tired of studying, so I didn’t take that job. I took a job with the IPS [Industrial Promotional Services] Industries. So they were making uh, so IPS provided the expertise to the local people, so the people who owned these industries, so they were four or five industries together in a block and the buildings were funded by Diamond Trust. Which is our institution right? So it was called techno plastics, so they were making plastic bottles, you know like the water bottles we have, and they were making tiles. So they were having problems in manufacturing proper products, the product was not as good as it should be so they

imported, so they had expertise coming from Germany and all that where there were industries. So I started as a junior, like as an assistant to the chief accountant and then I learnt the business and the trade. And then the chief accountant left and then I became the main accounts. So I worked there for two years and it was all a manual system. We didn't have computerization at that time and then I met Zul because he was working for Diamond Trust and we paid our rent and our mortgage to them, I can't remember how the building was financed right.

So then what happened was uh, so we got married in 1972 and he, Zul, he wanted to come to Canada but I had just come back from England. So when I went for England, I went for holiday because my uncle was there. I was looking to see whether I should become a CA and stay there but at that time I, you know, but I changed my mind and then I came back to Uganda and we got married in Uganda. And I knew him from working with Diamond Trust and all that. So when we came here, we came as refugees, so we had no money. So the Canadian immigration, so Zul already had his visa, he had applied for the visa and the status to come here but I wasn't so keen because I had come back from England and I had seen the lifestyle, and the lifestyle in East Africa was easy right? And we had good jobs and it was starting over again and we had just got married and I said not now. But then we had no choice so Idi Amin, you know, we just had to leave overnight. So when we came here the immigration said that banks are hiring a lot of women so I went to CIBC and put my application and of course I was overqualified so I got a job right away. So this was working as a foreign exchange clerk, like in the foreign exchange department. So it was like the kind of job, you know, it was just take any job just so you can get your feet wet and see what happens. So we lived with a professor for a week from York University and then we just got a rooming house and then Zul found a job within a few days too. And then we explored the market and we know that we had to get our equivalent Canadian designation.

So I worked for three months at the bank and I wasn't really happy there so I went back, and then I found out that you could get a job through employment agencies and all that. So I went there. So the employment agency said that I have enough accounting background so then I went to a small firm to get my basics and then everything was computerized. So I went to night school, first I had to learn keyboarding skills. So went to night school and got this job and it wasn't a senior position but at least it got me in the field. And then I started doing my CGA so I can get my equivalence to work in a proper accounting firm. So I went to night school and then uh, I found a job with. So I worked for a hardware association and then I worked for the stock market just for a little while, it wasn't a proper accounting job, and then I found a job at Cadillac Fairview. So this was a big company, I had a lot of employees, and their office was on, I don't know if you know Toronto but on Leslie and Sheppard. So this gave me my

foundation in the real estate industry. So I worked for them for a couple of years, still doing my courses and everything but they give you a lot of incentives and a lot of experience according to your qualifications and all that. And my biological clock was running out so I had to balance it out. So I had my son and then at that time, it was just like you had to go back to work within three months. So I said obviously I will come back after three months, you know. So the controller there at that time said you're doing your CGA, so they'll check on you so any time that you are ready you can come back and work part-time for us, or full-time but not the same position because I had to give my position away. So after a year I went back to Cadillac Fairview, you know, I worked on a contract basis with them. So it's better to have a job and look forward to another job.

So I went to another real estate industry, actually two real estate companies and then I had my daughter. And then it was '82-83 when there was a crisis in the housing market so the company I worked for they went bankrupt and I just had my daughter so I can't go back to them. So I decided to stay home for a year, and then after that I found a job at monarch. So monarch is a British company, so the company in the UK was a global company building everywhere so it was a very good company to work for. So I stayed with them for 30 years, because I had a family and I had to balance it all right? So he [Zul] went into his own business, so we can't burn the candle at both ends. So we needed stability in the family and all that. So I retired last year so I worked three years beyond my retirement since there is no mandatory retirement age. So in 2008 the banking crises and Taylor Woodrow was heavily in debt. They bought Wimpy, the two companies merged because of the debt situation, they had to sell the Canadian arm. Like they were doing business in the US and Canada together so they had to sell that business. So they sold it to an American-Canadian investor but they held it for a while but they sold it after a while. So they kept the American company and sold the Canadian branch so Mattamy bought it. So I worked with Mattamy for a year and then I retired.

So that's my story so far as my career is concerned, so now I'm retired and I do my gardening and pursue my hobbies. The other main things was when we had our children so because of the Canadian economy, you have to assimilate and your qualifications are, your equivalent qualifications are very important. So I learned a lot from friends at work and all that, so when my son was born I and we instilled that education was very important. Not just your technical skills but other skills that you need in the corporate world. So our first child is Hafiz and we put him into, so we put him, when I was working we put him into sports camps in the summer and Hafiz was also playing hockey. We put him in French immersions because you need to learn, and Canada was offering that and there was French immersion

so I heard about it from work and gave them everything that a normal Canadian child gets right plus our own value system.

So Hafiz did French immersion up until grade 8 but he was taught at a young age that he needed to have a professional education because it was too tough to go to school at night and work and have a family and all that. So Hafiz went to, he was bright child, he did very good. We also knew that the first 5 years of a child are very important. So we spent a lot of time teaching him at home too. So at that time they used to measure the intelligence of a child in grade 3, so they gave them intellectual testing and all that. So Hafiz was very good but the recommended not to send him to a specialized school because bright children might not have organizing abilities so it was better to stay in a public system. Basically what I am saying is that we explored all of the Canadian system in terms of what was best for the child. And then we lived in Thornhill, we couldn't afford private school but the schools in Thornhill were very good. And then Hafiz wanted to become a lawyer so I kept on telling him to do accounting and finance, what I know right"

[laughter]

Yasmin: "That was something that would put food on the table but he had his own dreams and ambitions so he managed to get into law school which was very hard, managed to get a job. And then when Farah was born she went to French immersion program too but she finished right up to, all through high school because we thought with Hafiz in high school you might not get too many career options if you are in the French immersion program but that didn't help Hafiz thought because he already knew, so Farah said well I can always switch back but she stayed right up until high school. So Farah has a degree from McGill, she was good at science. She went to McGill did her undergrad in science and majored in psychology, like science and psychology. She didn't get in, you know there's only one pharmacy school in Ontario so we sent her to the UK. My family lives in the UK so she became a pharmacist there, came back, had to write her exams. It was tough going, Farah had more challenges than Hafiz faced so then she passed her exam and now she's working as a pharmacist. So the bottom line with the Uganda experience is uhm, the values that you instill, what worked for us, speaking from my experience, what worked for us was to work hard, assimilate, keep your values but also assimilate with Canadian society and education is very important.

And besides technical skills you need to communications skills, you need to be able to work with people and all that right? There's a lot of challenges on the way but if you support your children emotionally, so it worked for us. Today I was talking to, I was just outside, my next door neighbor she was talking to me and she's from Romania so she was talking about uh the refugee crisis and Syrians and that we are

paying out of our tax to support this community and you know. And they generalize right? But then I was saying to her that I came as a refugee too but if you speak English and you are willing to work hard it pays off. So when I came, when I was working for Cadillac Fairview, they used to tell us that you're taking our job away but you say like Canada is full of people from other countries, I'm not taking anybody's job away.

Shezan: "So then your family where did they end up?"

Yasmin: "Ok so my family, they went to England. So what happened was my dad had a British passport first. And then he became a Canadian citizen. So there was something in the legislations"

Zul: "Ugandan citizen"

Shezan: "So then he gave up his British passport to become a Ugandan citizen?"

Yasmin: "No, he had a Ugandan passport. But something in Ugandan legislation, there was something, I don't know 100%. So then they said that, you know there were bodies in the street to make you scared. So my dad had uh, you know you do cash business, so they came homelike the military to see the money and I don't know whatever. So I'm the oldest and I have one brother and four sisters so six in the families. So my youngest sister was only 10 years old, so when the military comes in, you have your daughters, you hide them, like what are going to do. So what happened was they came in and my dad had a safe so when you open the safe there's another drawer behind. So I didn't know how they knew but they made him open it but they didn't see the hidden cupboards there so they didn't take everything but that really scared by dad. So then uhm, the British government would take them, so they left the business, so my dad had all the businesses and left them to my two-three cousins who were young like you right. And they said we'll go for a while and see what happens. So my dad stayed in the camp because they were a large family for 6 weeks. It was tough for them."

Shezan: "The camp was in England?"

Yasmin: "In England"

Zul: "Was it England or Italy?"

Yasmin: "North England, I don't know but one of my sisters was married when we left East Africa. So he was married and moved to England so she could help my parents a little bit. Then they got a council house in Manchester, so they lived in Manchester. So from my mother's side we have it in our genes to be intellectually bright so they got the British education. So they had grammar schools if your marks were good then you would go to a special school. So my sister went to grammar school, one of them, so she became a doctor, and she's married to a dentist. Same thing, people who went to England too, they tried really hard, so she got married to another Ugandan who equally worked hard. And my younger sister she became a, we have two accountants, my younger brother and my sister. And my sister was vice-president for one of the banking institutions and she has a lot of business sense. Now she owns two nursing homes and she also had a coffee shop, like a restaurant because of her in-laws. So she did quite well and my brother is an accountant and he worked for two companies and now he works in a consulting business. The children have done pretty good. My brother's two kids, he has a boy and girl, they're both lawyers. My sister who's married to a dentist, her daughters are both very bright so they're both dentists and my brother-in-law opened a business together. He was one of the partners, there were two other partners, so he bought the partners out and put his two daughters because it's hard to get a job in England as a dentist and he's bought properties and all that. And my sister in England, her husband had a store, like a gift store or something and all that.

So basically, with the immigrants like I would say that technical skills, if you get it, to work hard but what has hit is the emotional stability. It is still behind, the insecurity, so sometimes that what I see in my family. That because we were not secure as immigrants we pass that on to our kids but we have to work on it like it takes time right. The people I worked with, the drive that we had, the children have that drive but not as much. But when you work with other Canadians at work and all that. They resent you but they don't, I can't generalize because it depends on your families that you come to when you support your kids. They used to tell me like why are you paying for kids' education, you don't have to do this and all that. It's just that the value system that we have is different. So some of them, like our president and his wife is a CFO of one of the banks, they could afford all the financially they were so rich but they didn't believe in private schools and the girls didn't become doctors, lawyers, and things. So I think that uh, they let the children be who they are, choose their profession, be what they want to be but as immigrants our psyches are different.

So with the new generation it will be different right? But my neighbor was talking about all the changes but they resent us, like she was. So I'm sure we have certain areas, like Jubilee Gardens, some Ismailis that take advantage of the system that haven't done well or something. But sometimes as children it's about what you're given. Not everybody is in that position to pay for university degrees, have good jobs and all that right? So I think as far as, in a nutshell with the Ugandan refugees what worked for us was that we had the education system, we spoke English, we were taught the British way so we can get the Canadian equivalent right. But then it's not just Ismailis, the Hindus have done equally well, the Muslims have done equally well so."

Shezan: "They've all done well, especially the Goans as well, the Christians"

Yasmin: "What I'm saying is that it's not just that we generally didn't have issues, we had a lot of obstacles in the way in the jobs and all that, we just were able to, managed to work it out. It was just the timing. The company changed right at the end when I was about to retire. But not everybody is fortunate, you could lose your job at 55 and not be able to get back into the market place right? So it's your luck too."

Shezan: "It's your luck too"

Zul: "Yasmin has given quite a good background of the children but basically we are fourth generation or third generation Ugandans to an extent. My father was born in Uganda; I was born in Uganda. My mother was born in Mwanza, in Tanzania. My grandmother was grandmother was born in Nairobi. Both my maternal and paternal grandmothers were both born in Africa. So we were very early generations and so to an extent when Idi Amin expelled Ugandans he said all British subjects. Now, 80 percent of the people, when Uganda became independent they didn't take Uganda citizenship or they were offered Uganda citizenship and they became Uganda. 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 Uganda. I was born there so I was Ugandan so we were treated as stateless by United Nations. So our family became stateless but like uh Yasmin said after school I worked for Diamond Trust and two years prior to that I had been thinking of going overseas, either Canada or the United States. And I had applied and trouble started happening in Uganda so this was a golden opportunity and it is on the very day that Idi Amin announced, it was my wedding day."

We were sitting in a reception. So a couple of our friends 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 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. So that's how I came into the picture and I already had my passport stamped with Canadian papers. Yasmin wasn't and we were married on that day and we were on our honeymoon when the trouble started in Uganda. So I was in Kenya, so after three or four days we had heard that he has closed the border. Oh so we started going by Tanzania by Ngorongoro and all that and come to the Ugandan border. When we reached the border, that's the day when Obote bombed, no Idi Amin bombed Bukoba Tanzanian border and 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 I came back to Uganda, we didn't even go to my house, apartments, or nothing. We packed our things and the first flight because I had papers and Yasmin was enrolled and we left.

So I left, in my case, I'll give you a very interesting scenario and I talked to Hafiz. We landed in Montreal and we were in a queue to get our passport and all that. So I'm talking to a lady who's looking at my papers and all that and all of a sudden we hear the roar. People clapping and jumping and she said I have to go. She just left and came after five minutes and she came with a glass of champagne in her hand and put it aside and said that our team won against Russia. So Paul Henderson and scored at the moment when my passport was getting stamped! That's true, exactly 2 or 3 minutes apart my passport was stamped. Paul Henderson became my hero in a way. After a while staying here for forty years we can say way history in the making. So that's when I came to Canada. My family in Uganda, my brothers, my father passed away at a very young age, I was only 9 years old but we all managed to get into university and colleges.

Now not all Ugandans, like in Canada go to university, not even 3 percent of the community went to university, there are very few. 80 percent went into either business or high school or something. Only a few went abroad for higher education. So that's where we end up, so when we come back saying before, pre-Idi Amin, we were both graduates working in Uganda doing a beautiful job, salaries were good, everything was fantastic and this thing happened. So we in a situation where we didn't know what to do, we were not sales people or bookkeepers or something. We already had university grade

education so when we came to Canada and we settled down here in Toronto, they asked us, immigration, would you like to go to a hotel? No, he asked me why Toronto? I said well because I've heard about Toronto and most people who came in our batch, I think were asking to go to Vancouver and they were mostly Ismailis. Goans and others who were with us, when you made a presentation, there were quite a few of them there, and they had stayed, and I could see, I could see myself in the picture on the wall. So my picture was there, so I was on the first flight that came to Canada. Within the first 10 days she had a job, within another 5 days I had a job so we were working from the day go. Never been under UIC in our entire life. So that's us in that way.

So we had a job from the very beginning and worked through and that's the extent of the beginning of our career in Canada. When it comes back to Uganda our families, a similar situation like Yasmin's family but fortunately half of my family was stateless they could come to Canada directly. So they didn't have to go to a camp or anything, so that's the two different situations but the family because I never worked in the business, my brother and my mom, they worked in the business and they lost everything, everything. So when they came here, I was the only person here. My one brother was in England, my other brother was in Boston and so we were far apart. I was given a choice whether to take American green card and go to Seattle because or, Canada, they were also a Liberal government at that time. So that's the choice we had and uh so when we came to Uganda they had, they came here directly because I was in Toronto. 'Cause I was in Toronto and my brother, my younger brother in Boston because we had six months to go to the United States to go to Seattle. And at that time he told me Seattle is a one industry town – Boeing. He said what are you going to do there, I'm talking about forty years ago and it's true because Seattle was only Boeing, there was nothing else in there. So he suggested, stay in Canada because New York is so close by, Boston is close by you can always come. So we stayed in Toronto.

Shezan: "Your mom and brother came almost a month after?"

Zul: "Within six to eight weeks. Now they came in under a different program altogether. So there was, because they were a family, my brother had two kids, my mom, and my sister-in-law. So they offered them an apartment, a rental apartment, in Mississauga, and slowly, slowly they moved back into Don Mills area years after. So they went there. My brother was in England, he was there advising us helping my younger brother who is in Boston, came to see everything as we were settling down. And we were settled right from the day go. It was not that we were lucky only but we had insight into what to expect. A friend of my brother from England wrote me a letter saying in Toronto, I've got a friend, a brother-in-

law in Toronto and this is his address. So contact him, so you know by the time you get your letter and all that. So I got a letter from him and said oh, so I asked my land lady where is this address? It's just behind, one block behind? One block behind means what? So any way we started walking so a second person said it's just right there. Coincidentally the contact that I had was one street behind and he had come from England. He was staying with his girlfriend and there was another guy. And he was working in a garage. His job was to go and park cars and the other guy who was with him, he says, I'm a, the word he used to use, he was only joking, I'm an industrial mechanic. So what do you? Elevator up and down, remember in the olden days, they would take you up, and what floor are you going? And we became friends but meanwhile our parents also came in and I still remember going to work and we had a snow on the in the first year.

So we were going to work and when I came out, a couple of people were watching and asking me why am I walking like a duck? Because snow was there and I didn't want to fall down and they were laughing until I reached Spadina station because I might fall down because I was dressed up to go to work. I didn't have the rubber? But we had the shoes and a whole spectrum of winter clothing that was there but that was the laughing things that we had. Another laughing experience that we had. It was uh when we didn't know what half and half cream was. So we, Yasmin and I both were going for a walk so we saw a Mac's Milk and we bought potato chips and we bought milk. We said oh wow such a nice strong milk they have here no water added into it turned out that it was a half and half cream.

[laughter]

Zul: "But that's the way we learnt. Those are the silly things that would happen. Within six months we rented an apartment in crescent town, a brand new building. They said there's one on the 11th floor and one on the 26th floor in a 29 floor building. I said I wanted the 26th floor. They said no problem but it's \$8 more per month. I said \$8 dollars more that's not too much more rent, so we took it. And I could see everything and my family would come and they all be looking around and enjoying but that was an experience that I don't forget as fast because afterwards so many buildings came in. In the last forty years things have changed. So that's one part of the Toronto experience when we came to Canada. And uh, I within 8 to 9 months we also went to George Brown, got our papers were certified, joined accounting programs and all that. Within 8 to 12 months I had a job, a very good job actually, with Bayer which is a laboratory in their accounting department. They would give me any work and it would be done right away and they said I gave you work. So he, the accountant started doing more work. I liked to do his work and he would be folling around but I would do lots of work. So by the time I knew everything. So when he left I became the accounting supervisor within less than a year and then within

another year I got another job for Johnson and Johnson another big corporation and I worked there for nine years.

My last position with them was as an accounting manager and then I became a treasury manager and that's where the bug to go into the retail business was there. By then we had a house of our own, we had bought a house in Black Valley Avenue within our second year we had bought a house, a townhouse. And then we bought a, Yasmin used to work in real estate so we knew the areas and we bought in Thornhill. We moved in Thornhill and stayed in that house for 20 years. A detached house and in those days it was considered very high end. And uh we never looked back but I went into the retail business then. Then I worked for two years as a treasury officer for the Toronto Star, which is Harlequin books which was bought out by Toronto Star. And that's the time when we had three stores. Yasmin was working full time as an accountant and I was working also as a treasury officer.

So we went into the retail business as a hobby, nothing special, and then it developed into three stores. And then became a pretty powerful chain called gentlemen's coat. It was a chain in most major malls, from Markville to Scarborough Town Centre to Centre point, to Eaton Centre, to Yorkdale to Promenade. We were all over the place. We were a high end men's accessories and gift store. And 80 percent of the merchandise, the merchandise that we had in the store was all imported. So people in those days, afterword people were looking for things made in Canada or made in Italy and people would come in my store and they would hardly find anything made in China in those days. And our chain grew up and we had another chain, another store called Princeton house. Which was an Ivey league casual dress store. It was run by my younger brother but that's a retail aspect of our lives.

So coming into Canada we worked for the community. I was also chairman of the Ismailia Business Persons Association for three years. Served in the community as *mukhi's* [officiants of religious services] and all that. We moved into this house in Unionville some 15 years ago from Thornhill to here. So we've been living in Markham for nearly 38 years of our life in Canada. The first three years was in Toronto, sorry four years and the rest was all in Markham here. Thornhill and Markham. And of course like Yasmin said, my son Hafiz and Farah. Farah did her McGill and she did a Master's in drug addiction and pharmacy. She's a manager of a pharmacy and West Park rehab centre and Hafiz is uh, was a partner in a law firm and now he is a legal counsel for motion picture. His wife is also a partner in law firm BLG, both of them couldn't work in the same firm when they moved from Ottawa because when they moved here they couldn't take the husband and wife in the same company. When they were married they could work there but here they couldn't. So he went into private industry and she continued. So that's that part. The rest of my family members."

Shezan: “The younger brother that worked in retail he was the one from Boston?”

Zul: “No he was a pharmacist, he passed away. Then my other brother who was a veterinarian who joined the business when we had many stores, he was writing his exams and temporary joined and then became a permanent. He passed away five years ago in an airplane crash in lake Muskoka because there were five friends that went with a glider plane and all that. And his plane went further and was not found until the next morning. The plane was found but his body was dead by then. And my elder brother who was with me who was in England who had moved here. He was apparently in law school in England. He came to East Africa for holidays, and he met with an accident when we were on safari so he became a paraplegic so he went back to England and he was working with Laval company there. So because our family was here, my mom kept insisting that he should come here. So he came here, he joined with me and we did business together. So he ran the financing, and all the running of the business in the office. And uh that’s how, we were five brothers, the other elder brother who came with my mom with two kids, he passed away also at a very young age. So I’m the only surviving brother and I’ve got two sisters and they’re all here. My younger sister was in England at that time so when she married, she had no problem getting visas since we were here. They came on their own and they went into business of their own. Her husband was a chartered accountant, and she was an experienced business admin and hair stylist and all sorts of things. And my other sister she married a doctor Mossa who is also from Uganda also and he settled in Vancouver but now they are back here. I ran a very successful chain of stores for 32 years. I had the retail business for 32 years in a major mall. And because of the scarcity of the family history, younger people passing away at a young age. Hafiz as a lawyer was not interested in business and Farah, I wasn’t going to recommend to go into business either, so that’s when we ended up. When I became the chairman of the small business association I made a presentation at that time, I jokingly was laughing at it, I said when we were in East Africa, when our parents said, when we came home and our marks were not so good...

Break to answer phone

Shezan: “One of the questions I had was when you were originally thinking between the US and Canada, what gave you that idea earlier?”

Zul: "USA, my brother was there in Boston"

Shezan: "Before the expulsion?"

Zul: "Before because there were only two countries that I could think of. I wanted to go to Canada and because USA was also giving visas at that time so I said I might as well, if I don't like Canada, I can always go to the US. So that was the one thing, that was the most important thing because I knew more about USA than Canada. And I remember when I was interviewed in Nairobi, in 1970, by Molloy the guy, he was the one who interviewed me in Nairobi, nothing to do with the Uganda crisis. He asked me one question, why Canada? Look outside, look at the weather, do you know how cold it is there sometimes? Minus 18 sometimes. So I said, I had no perception what minus 18 means. So I said there are 20 million people living there, why won't I be able to live. He looks at me, hmmm, you're a brave one [stamps paperwork]. I still remember that, I said if twenty million people are living there, at that times there was 20 million people or so living there, I don't really know how many, why can't I live there. And he says what do you know about Canada, I said lumberjack. That's what we learned in geography in school. And a friend of ours, my landlady's brother had come from Hamilton, he had come from Kampala and he was a doctor, so I was asking him all the questions. How's housing there and he gave me he was working and made 1800 dollars and I calculated into Uganda shillings at that time wow so much money you get? And I say how about the housing it's so cold. He said you know there's a grand hotel in Kampala, the Apollo hotel, you see the high rise building, you see all the pools and everything that's how the buildings are. Condominiums, the high rise condominiums, you have a pool you have this, you have that. It's all just like that, I said really, that's amazing. Like you know, of course I used to work for diamond trust, we had the largest and tallest building in Kampala so that, knowing that, prior to that, that's when they mentioned it to me and I said wow I can understand these Diamond Trust buildings but having residential buildings, these were residential buildings with ordinary people living in there. I was just curious to find out. So that attracted me but USA, in the first 6 months and every 3 months we would go to Boston since my brother was there and he would come here and we loved Boston. Beautiful, you go through Montreal, Lake Placid. Still I go to Lake Placid, I still go to those main areas and we still like driving there. The nature, it's just beautiful and because the family came in here.

The rest of my family came here we became anchored in Toronto. And uh when I went to our place of worship, the jamat khane, we were about 180 Ismailis at that time. And uh, maybe in 3 months while I was volunteering in one of the leadership positions there, I met a lot of people, and I still remember on

the Danforth. Still we were talking last week only, the pizza we used to get, that your cheese would spread out all the way, we were still joking, we never get pizza like that again. I mean all homemade, so my friend and my nephew had gone to New York and they said uncle we had this pizza just like you were mentioned Sadano pizza or something and I said that's what we used to have on the Danforth. So USA, and because of me going often to the US and because I was working for Johnson and Johnson, our offices, all the companies that I had worked for earlier were all American based in US, Bayer, Diagnostic, Johnson and Johnson, they are all American based companies. Because I was in management in the beginning we traveled a lot.

We went to different conferences all the time. So the US wasn't a novelty in particular. It was something good because we had been to England, Yasmin had been to England, and I had gone to England. So we were a little bit familiar with what was to be expected. It was not a novelty to us, no. So that's an answer to why USA. I think if I'm not mistaken, the Norwegian government was also giving visas at that time but we said Norway, we looked on the map and it's so far away. We didn't pay much attention, so we traveled to the States. In Toronto, like I said to you, Hafiz or my nephew who's in Toronto here, they all are coming here, they come to my house we get together because I live in this area and it's much closer, and we hardly, the only thing that I could see negative about it, is our parents. I was going to work in Kampala, or in Toronto, or whether I was going to work in Vancouver it didn't matter much. But my parents who's livelihood was in business.

So I was telling you about the conference, uh, my first speech was, I said when we worked from Mbarara to Kampala in a hostel and when we came home, we had a 68, how come you did get 90? Anyway so my brother would say to us. If you don't study you will become like me a businessman a *dukhawallah*, here. And I told the AIB, it was cursed at that time to be in business, not knowing, and I've gone into the retail business, and I was a very successful retail business in Toronto. We were very high end, business was, complimentary store to Harry Rosen and Holt Renfrew, we were in between because they bought brand name but I also bought from these factories where they bought but I didn't have the same costs. I didn't have head costs, I didn't have a budgeting manager, I didn't have a shipping supervisor. I was the shipping supervisor, I was the manager, I was the salesperson, not the actual sales but our cost was not there. And I would be traveling at night from Paris to Milan, an overnight train at 11 o'clock, no hotel expenses. So that's that part so significant part for you, from a third generation Ugandan coming into Canada, no graduated came back to Uganda to work, and uh then had to leave the job and come to Canada. Brought our papers and examinations and ever since we have never looked backward. Always forward, went into business. If I hadn't had the historical problem, I would have stayed in business for a

long, long time but I had to wrap it up but not knowing what would end up. Today, I wanted to, we are going online, today if the same situation came in, if I build up a store if anything happens to me what's there? The kids are not interested right?

So that was the issue, it was not a business that somebody can pick up, buy it, and start running. The fashion business is such that you have to sense, you have to feel, feel that market, and those things. So mine was very famous, gentlemen's coat in every major mall in Toronto and we were greatly respected. The landlord paid us to open a store in the mall. So I was open in Rideau Centre, once upon a time in Ottawa. You know where you go in from the Westin Hotel on the corner there, we negotiated but then again transport, getting items there often. You can't trust, leave somebody to run, you have to be constantly in touch, constantly coming and going and the distance was tough. My son was in Ottawa by that time and he says that I'm finishing and I'm coming to Toronto, not knowing that he would stay there for another eight years after. So that's the Ugandan part of it. Once you're finished, I can give you names of people that you would want to finish and I'll give you their numbers also. They are prominent, successful, and have done well for themselves and are well integrated in Toronto and Canada. So I'll give you names. Do you have any other questions?"

Shezan: "Yeah and then I guess sort of my last question would be, is how would you identify yourself today? Are you Ugandan-Canadian, Canadian-Ugandan, there's no wrong answer."

Zul: "This is always a problem. Yasmin will be saying and talking about those Canadians. And my son would say those Canadians, who are you? We are Canadians too and we, and when we talked we meant white people, Canadian. And my son would say, because they were born here, he says then who are you? So mom am I not a Canadian? And she says oh yes yes, so how do you identify has become, I was always, even today, when I was in Morocco, I was in a tour with Australians, a New Zealand guy, and four Americans and a lady from the United States started talk to me. She said, where are you from? I'm from East Africa, like Moroccos is North Africa and I'm from East Africa. And then she says but aren't there black people there? So I said yes so my forefather's came in during the British Empire to work in, or come for businesses or whatever reasons they had. So we settled there and as a result we started, and my parents like I said, my dad was born in a farm, my brother was born in the farm. We had a farm in Uganda and then they had gone into business. So we are Ugandan born, bred, grew up in that environment. So am I an African? I am of Asian heritage, African birth or cultural background. If you look at the mosaic, completely, where am I? That question keeps coming. That lady, she asks you are not, you

don't look like an Indian. Because India in their perception was slightly darker complexion or something. And I said, yeah maybe, I'm coming from the northern part of India, south of Afghanistan and Tajik. I had to give them a story that they can buy. Neither they could buy me, and because I don't know too much about when my forefather's came. I have been dinged for that now. But my identity is always that I had an identity problem but you know one thing, all these years, Yasmin will mention it, we have never been called Pakis, we have never been discriminated. Because from the beginning the job, the dressing, the way we behaved, we did all those things, what was Ugandan cultural mediums. We were middle to middle-upper class people.

So when we came here, because only those people could go to England and get educated unless they got a scholarship from the government of Aga Khan scholarship, so they were all affluent families. Yasmin's family was affluent, my family was affluent in their own way. My two brothers were in England, two were in Boston, so you can imagine that even a *dukhawallah* can send his children to England, and again this is fifty years ago. So that's how it is. Now my children, I can't read in Gujarati, and my daughter comes in one day and she's getting married to an Ismaili guy and she went to her boyfriend's house and grandmother comes, and she comes home and says how come you didn't teach me Gujarati? My daughter comes and asks Yasmin, how come you never taught me Gujarati? Because we thought English and French was the language of this country and that's what they learnt. And I can vouch 100%, don't underwrite that if you think French is not an asset. Because Hafiz worked, articulated at the Supreme Court and this because he had French and English both. He went to the University of Ottawa because of English and French.

So he it did help, now when they want to appoint someone as a judge, English and French. My daughter-in-law, she studied in French throughout, Nadia, and English and she speaks Arabic with her parents, she's of Syrian heritage so when they are there, our lifestyle, eating going, driving, is just normal Canadian, North American style. We don't, we went to Indian movies with a friend of mine on Saturday and said, doesn't she know what it, some Indian word means? I don't know either, she looks at me at says what? Because we never paid much attention to Gujarati, teaching in Gujarati was stopped in Aga Khan schools at a very young age so English became the major language and the second language was French, in Uganda, in the Aga Khan school. So our background was always Africanization, or African local country and uh the motto that was said to us, be loyal to the country of your adoption and that what his Highness had said. Be loyal to the country of your adoption and we adopted Uganda as a country. And when we came here, we adopted Canada as our country. So there's no backward looking or anything. I am the chair of the Lion's club here and in a lot of meetings they start talking in Punjabi and all this and I

say no speak in English because I don't understand, I can't respond to them in their language though my heritage is Indian. They assume that I should know, and then I say my heritage could be Sindhi because I could be from Hong Kong because this guy said Rupani is a Sindhi name. He says you know all Rupanis are Sindhis, all Rupanis are rich business people. I said that makes sense I am rich now [laughter]. It's a question of identity are you Sindhi are you Gujarati."