### 2012\_esch\_UgAs\_03

### *Can you start by telling me your name*

### Narentra, narentra Lothia

### *Can you spell that for the tape*

### N- A-R-E-N-T-R-A -L-O-T-H-I-A

### *And your date of birth Mr. Naren*

### 21 sorry 24, [he laughs] 1, 5-2

### *Fiver two, so fifty two, so that makes you…*

### Sixty

### *And can you tell me where you were born?*

### Maska Uganda

### *Right, and erm what was it like growing up in Uganda*

### I was born there, it was very nice, yes,

### *In what way was it nice?*

### The country that you get used to, is your home, yeah the weather was nice also we didn’t expect to come ina icey cold country

### *What did your father do?*

### My father was a post master and then when he retired he became a business man

### *Right and that was in Uganda*

### Yes yes

### *And ww what type of business did he have*

### He had a retail business ina selling hi-fi, records, watches, and second hand clothes

### *And long did he have that business for?*

### From nineteen sixty four to nineteen sixty nine

### *And what was life like for you as a family living in Uganda*

### Much nicer, and in those days I much younger, not married, you know it was different

### *Did all the Asian communities stick together or did you mix much with erm the Africans or*

### Personally we did, my father taught all his children you know, to be alike, we all belong to one god and we were taught to associate with every religion and every culture, every cast and every creed

### *Was there much mixing around communities, did communities get together or was it like a very close knit community the*

### Yes, Asian community mixed up only within the Asian, but generally ourselves my family we always had seen co communities coming to our house, and we’ve gone to different people

### *Where did your father come from*

### Originally from India

### *Whereabouts in India*

### He was born In Africa, his father came to Africa

### *Right so why did his father to Africa*

### He came to work in a rabbi, he was bought to east Africa by British, well world company you know

### *So you been, you third generation in, in*

### I was the third generation there yes

### *And what was school like In Uganda*

### We had a level education there, Cambridge so eh yeah yeah very good education

### *And what did you study*

### Metricalasian

### *Right, and erm what did you do when you left school*

### When I left school, I was working for my dad, even when I was in the school I was working with my dad and I after I left I was working with him, and then he thought it was better that I work for somebody else and then found me a job as an insurance sales man and-eh that’s what I was doing until I left Uganda.

### *Where where did you get married in Uganda*

### Yes yes

### *Was it an arranged marriage?*

### Yes yeah

### *So how did you meet your wife*

### My father saw her, yes, she was a daughter of err my father’s friend yes

### *Right, and as she from Uganda or?*

### Yes she was from Uganda

### *And her family lived there*

### Course her family lived there yes

### *What was your house like in, in Uganda*

### Big house, yes

### *Can you describe it a little bit*

### It was with many room, we lived upstairs ur above the shop, so it was easy to in the shop, back home shop wherever, my parents needed us we were there and then come back upstairs to study. Play around and that was it

### *How many brothers and sisters did you have*

### We are six brothers and two sisters

### *Big family*

### My uncle also used to live us, two uncles used to live with us, and two aunties

### *Right*

### Yes coz my father was the eldest in the family and er he had to look after all his brothers and sisters and-eh his children

### *So he must’ve had to work hard then, to look after a*

### My father was blessed, he was very kind hearted and he could, since he had pure thoughts, and was always ready in helping

### *Right*

### Yeah

### *That’s really nice, so erm it must’ve in quite nice growing up in such a big family, you kinda looked after each other*

### Yes

### *So what kind of games did you play you know*

### Cricket, marbles, cycling, football, athletic we also err had cross country sometimes yeah, so we had and numerous other games, we also played like monopoly, ludo got too many other little games, some we used to create ourselves you know

### *Like what, remember any?*

### Just fun games you know, yeah I can’t remember any much but it was because you didn’t want to spend much money and they were not that easily available so it was fun, the mind was always creative

### *I know had to make things up didn’t you*

### Yes

### *So you were obviously well you they were under British rule erm what was it like when the British rule in Uganda*

### When the British ruled, I was very young so I will not be able to compare much, yeah, yeah

### *So what was it like I mean what why did you come to the UK?*

### Well almost everyone knows what Edi Amin has done and why we were here, he had a dream that all the Asians were to be sent away from Uganda, because they were making the eh economy of Uganda, and eh as it was dream in such a way that he thought, instructed him so he did it

### *What was it like when Edi Amin came to power?*

### You won’t believe When he came to power the very next day he was in our shop, I remember this because we got scared, xxxx and eh he seemed to be pleasant man, when we met him he shook our hands and he put his hand on my eh my head coz I was little you know and eh he just walked away

### *Did he say anything*

### No he just wanted us to support him, and he asked if we were happy

### What do you think we answered [he laughs] you guessed yes,

### *Can’t really..wha wha, I mean did he come with alot of people did he?*

### He had an army with him, he also was carrying a gun, erm pistol with him err full army dressed yes, I can remember he had a pistol on his left side

### *And he just walked into your shop*

### Yes, and my neighbours shop as well......first he went to his neigh- er our neighbour

### [phone rings] excuse me

### *Yes of course*

*So yeah when Eddie Amin came in did you know that he was coming?*

No we didn’t know he was coming. It was just a surprise visit.

*And he turned up with all his, his army?*

Yes.

*How scary was that?*

Very scary it was, but it happened so fast that the later feeling was quite comfortable, you know. As nothing had happened so we were quite, quite happy that nothing had happened.

*Hmm, were people very scared of him?*

Yes, they were all scared of him. Everyone, during his power, very scarred. Because err, we often heard stories where he would arrest ministers, or anyone who’s not on his side. They would be arrest, tortured and sometimes even killed.

*Yeah, so did you know anyone that had, that had happened to?*

No, not personally that I err, that not that personally I know, knew anyone. But we often use to her hear stories about, even when I was so young. Err we use to hear these kind of things because we had to be very safe, err as to where we go, up to what time we go, and when we come back home. For our safety.

*Hmm, your mother must have been petrified.*

Mothers are always petrified, whether Eddie Amin was in power or not. [Laughs]

*So did you see things change when he was in power?*

Things changed yes, but not for good, things changed for worse. Erm, since err, his army use to loot a lot of shop keepers. They use to visit shops almost every so often whenever they needed money or goods you they would just come and take it.

*So that happened to your Father a lot?*

My Father was a very calm loving person. And he believed in God.,And god that will protect him. We were pretty safe. Nothing had happened to us. As to any harassment, or, no nothing like that.

*Was it a shock when Eddie Amin told everyone to leave?*

It was a shock for those people who had no money, and they didn’t know where to go. Yes it was shock. But for those who had British passports and they knew that they could come here. Since most people were in connected with United Kingdom, they knew what they were coming to.

*Cos you weren’t given long to get out, were you?*

We were given ninety days only. And during those ninety days, your documents had to be prepared, we have experienced err, long, long, it was like a second world war. Situation in Uganda, everything was rushing. Military check points everywhere. Err, if you had any money, which you would because you had to buy tickets, or you had to buy you know food. You know, while you are waiting in the queue, and this money sometimes were taken away by the check points. We didn’t experience this, like I said God was always with us, yeah, we didn’t experience, but a car in front of us, it happened to that car once I remember. But not to us.

*What actually happened to the car in front?*

He just asked err this person to come out. They checked his wallet, you know. And err, I remember a lady came out from the car as well, almost everybody came out but there was a lady in the car and the army men was going all over, you know touching, this women. And it was nothing the men could do or we could to help, you could only pray that they would be safe, left alone, quickly and, that they would let them go. And that's what happened, but they took the wallet. Complete wallet. Yes.

*So what happened? Did your father- was he able to get anything out of the country? Was he-*

My father was an honest man, like I say he was very Godly, he’d never sent money out of the country like many Asians did, and therefore he did not have any money overseas. Yeah.

*So you had ninety days to get out and erm, could you take anything with you?*

We were allowed to take only fifty pounds, English money.

*Right and-*

B-Both family.

*And that included all of your extended family or just, your father-*

Per family, not per person. My father was allowed to take fifty pounds.

*So you had to leave the whole business behind.*

Yes, we had to leave the whole business behind, yeah.

*So where, when did you know you were coming to the UK?*

We didn’t come to the UK, like I said I’m not British Citizen. I’m a Netherlands. From there, because we were Ugandan citizens, we were Ugandan Asian; we did not have British Passport. So we were in a dilemma, either we go to India, or we go to contraries that are sponsoring, to take certain professional Asians from Uganda. And err it was a very hard choice. I had an opportunity to go to Switzerland, also to Canada. But my father wasn’t, and I wanted to stick with the family, so I gave up those two chances, and we stick together. We were searching for a possible sponsor to take us somewhere, out of, out of Uganda. We did not want to go to India because we did not know anybody there. And we had heard that the Europeans are very helpful, and most of our families were coming to United Kingdom. So maybe it will be easier for us to go to Europe and then maybe in future con, reconnect to our families . And that's what we did. Err we had a sponsor err, to take us to Austria, in the world’s biggest refugee camp. We settled in Austria as refugees. Within days, the Dutch ,the Swedish, the Finnish, German, Belgium, Luxemburg, all these countries came to, take certain amount of Asian people from this particular camp. Again they did not err, discriminate whether it should be professional or non professional or disable or it didn’t matter to them. It was completely on a humanitarian ground that they will take us. And err, we decided, that we would go to Netherlands. Looking at the map, Netherlands was not too far from United Kingdom and that they spoke English. Err very well, and we thought and we felt since it was a personal invitation from the queen herself, in those days it was queen Juliana, erm in Netherlands. Her majesty was absolutely kind. And the delegation was given specific instructions how to treat us. What to do with us. That they would feel proud, that Netherlands, the Dutch people would feel really proud that they have helped somebody and that they’ve honoured somebody, and they’ve honoured their own queen, in such a way that they’ve treated us with dignity. So we came to the country, they gave us home, clothes, money, jobs. Whatever that was necessary that was given to us straight away. Yes. We came during the winter time, so not only the delegation at that, but the Dutch people themselves, came along and offered us help, take us to there homes, try teach us their language, try and teach us what they err do, how they live. Even find us jobs. You know in many cases, they become really part of our families. Yes. And err, eventually we managed to come to United Kingdom, because the- England joined the EC, it wasn’t then, the restrictions were taken away.

*So how long were you in the refugee camp for?*

Only for a few days.

*What was it like in the refugee camp?*

Err my memory... it was not very good. For many people, because I can remember one of the richest man in Uganda who had, erm, erm, very big business there, was with as a refugee. Had nothing at all. And erm, we were taken away from this particular camp, to err, brought to another camp. And over there we were given rooms, individual rooms, err we had special kitchen where we could cook our own food, but for the community not individual. Yes, whatever you do you had to do it for the community, the whole community that was that. In the camp people were trying to give us some clothes. Some food or whatever, whoever came to give something, there were, people were jumping for it, as if they never seen anything like that before. And to see one of these rich men, a business man to behave like that was shocking. You know. That was shocking. We, we were not really like that, we were just waiting for our turn, always discipline that we were told not to rush by our father. Just relax. What will come to you, will come to you. And err, obviously waited for things to happen, we had the best, always the best. Yes, people could see this, people are not rushing, so they would come say look take this.

*So how much were you allowed to take with you, fifty pounds and what just a suitcase?*

Even the suitcase in our, in our case nothing was taken away, but in many cases some of the suitcases were taken by the, by the, by the err check points. Armies you know. Some could bring something, some people could not bring anything you know. In our case we had some of clothes. Short sleeve shirts and light trousers, you know. It wasn’t enough. Yeah.

*So you went to, where about in Holland did you go to?*

We were taken to Amsterdam, oh yes were given also special tour by the queen. For the, for the, countries of major cities in the country. We were taken in the buses, the trams, and trains. They showed us the country within days. Where we, we were, where we were coming to live. Yes.

*So did they give you accommodation in Amsterdam?*

That they gave us a little, we were first brought into a camp again, because they were not ready for us. They took very impulsive decision; err to take fifty families, not fifty people, fifty families. Err could be family for just two or family in our case for ten you know, but fifty. We were taken to a camp first and from that camp each individual was given a place in a different place. It was then very well organised by them, because they did not want us to live together. They wanted us to learn to emancipate with the society, which I think the British made the mistake when the Asian came here. They were sent to all one particular place like Leicester and err Southall at the time you know. And the rest, the Dutch people sent us all into different places. Sometimes we were miles away from each other, you know.

*Did that make you feel alienated at all?*

No it was for the benefit for of our own self. You know, it was, acceptable. We were not scarred because we initially we were very welcomed, well hearted. And err we did not feel anything like that no.

*And what was the accommodation like that they gave you?*

Brand new flats, brand new furniture, brand new curtains. Brand new err, kitchen err utensils. Everything brand new. Brand new carpets. Brand new bed. You know.

*Your dad made the right choice didn’t he?*

Yes, he made a right choice. But it was not just with us, we hear then wherever people went in Europe they were given a similar treatment. They all had fantastic treatment. They all settled down, very well in Europe.

*So what, what job was your given? Was he given a job or-*

When he left Uganda then he did not work err, at all. He was mainly a representative of the fifty Uganda families with the Dutch government, and he became err, like a service man, you know. To the Asians, the Ugandan Asians in Netherlands, he will be present for any problems or translations or any, any other, he was like a minister. Yes.

*That's great, so what did you do in Holland?*

Well I came first in Holland I started looking for a job. And err, they were going to find me a job, but luckily when I s- I said they’ve done so much for us I think its also our duty to see if we can err, get up and look for jobs ourselves. Which I did. I went in one of the offices and somebody there spoke English, because I did not speak Dutch at all at the time. Only I picked up a few words to say thank-you good-bye and err, hello, you know. The guy tried to help me in translation, and he realised that I will not get a job there, but he said I think I know where I can get you a job. So he took me to one particular insurance company. And the insurance company saw this as a fantastic opportunity for them, to come into the media. Because we were very much in the media at the time in the Dutch national news paper and everywhere. You know, especially my father. Yeah he was almost every day in the newspaper. [Laughs]

*Was he really?*

For one reason or the other.

*What did he do, I mean-*

For helping mostly the Ugandan people in the Dutch government, err, he became a media between the two, and err, he was, he done a good job for many people. I am proud of my dad. Yes. and err yes this guy took me to this particular place and err without an interview [laughs] even though I don’t speak Dutch, I don’t write Dutch, I was given a job, and the next thing, I had all these newspaper guys coming into the office taking my pictures you know, and asking me this and that, like what are you doing now, you know, it was like err, like a hero. [Laughs] Yes I was in the newspaper again, yeah.

*Right were you married at this time?*

Yes, yes, yes, yeah.

*So your wife was-*

Also yes.

*Did she work at all?*

No.

*No, no, no, so how long were you in insurance, in, in, Holland?*

I worked there for six months, I was frustrated because I could not write, or speak that much, I had like almost twenty, thirty by then, err, I was a fast learner, to learn languages, because in Africa we spoke quite a African languages, native languages, so naturally we were, [phone rings] excuse me.

*It’s alright.*

### *So yeah so erm*

### Yeah so er after six months I decided within 6 months I had decided that, ill open my own business, and I did

### *And what was your business*

### I was the first Ugandan Asian to open a business in the Netherlands, yeah...i was selling, I was importing beads from India, had crafted beads and I was selling them to the err we used to call it kulsmafarid but I don't know what is the English word for it, err they are special handy craft shops, were you sell these kind of things, those people very, they really love handy crafts, there were always one or two shops in one town of this kin, we had customers all over, I was doing so well that within three months I bought my brand new car, also again the first Ugandan Asian to buy a new car [he laughs] yes, I was very young but I did my Father was very proud of me, yes I did very well in the business, and eh I was trying help others at the same time, to see if they could do the same thing you know in a different way, yeah there I was, then I came here

### *So how long did you do that for?*

### I did that for nineteen seventy four, I also had a Dutch partner, in this business you know, who was interested to help me invest money into it, buy second hand car because I had to go round and I managed to do this business for nineteen seventy four to nineteen seventy eight, yes

### *And what did you do in seventy eight*

### Then I stopped this business, then I was selling second hand cars, that kind of things afterwards

### *Why did you stop the business if it was*

### It, my partner wanted to have some more money coz he was doing so well I rather stop

### *So you went and sold second hand cars*

### Yes

### *How did that go*

### That also went very well, I was selling cars from there to Nigeria and Ghana, again I back to the African natives you know [he laughs]

### *And what was it like living in Holland*

### Very nice, very very nice, very clean country the Dutch people were I would say fantastic people, yes

### *So when did you come over, over to eh the UK*

### Er nineteen eight two

### *Why did you come over here?*

### My families were here

### *That must’ve been such a big difference*

### Yes yes

### *An where about in the UK did you come to*

### I came to east ham first yes

### *So what was it like, what was your first impression when you came over to East Ham*

### Well I met alot of Asians, because when I was in Netherlands I was already coming to see my friends you know, almost once a month, so I was almost used to the country

### *So it was no different really*

### Yes, I first came to this country in nineteen seventy three and from then on, almost every, every so often, sometimes six times a year I was here

### *And what was your first impressions in nineteen seventy three?*

### When I came to England?

### *Yeah*

### Er it was, first it was quite unusual, unusual for me because err things were different from the continent, people talked so many beautiful things about United Kingdom when I was in Uganda, there was a great respect for the country and the people, when I came first here I I loved it as much I loved er Holland, and I realised people were also equally friendly, the British society are the best society and yes I would say the most tolerant people in Europe, I would say the British people are really

### *What more so then the Dutch*

### Yes, the Dutch can tolerate.....only if they know you, if they don't know you they will not tolerate you and that has happened to me, coz I when I was business and I could not speak the language and I'm trying to do business in English they’ll say sorry, I'm not gonna buy this from you until you come back and speak to me in Dutch

### *You’re kidding*

### Not I'm not kidding, and that was not just once or twice, many times in many shops, would do the same, expected foreigners if they liaison to speak their language, and I I understood their point, and I really did learn the language properly and every time I went there I tried, tried to speak Dutch and they would give me a little alley way say okay, next time probably better [he laughs] yeah that's how it was.

### *So when you first came to erm to East Ham, what did you do*

### I was unemployed, coz then I had already, I was selling some cars off and on, but-eh then I was looking for a job, err jobs were difficult, I have never worked for anybody in my life apart from that insurance company, and eh when another insurance company which was short period of time because by the time my Father found me a job, on settling we had time to leave, so there was not much experience working for somebody else, I decided to er to open a another business here, it was difficult no money, and err we spent all of our time, looking for something prospective we couldn’t find anything, yeah me and my wife, my wife was working at the time, she found a job in one of the hotels as a register clerk she was doing fantastic there, that kept us going, yea I do not believe in signing on, so erm I didn’t want to do anything of that sort, neither it were done before......at that point, I found one company that was trying to give me a job and I refused to take the job but I said I will work as a commission agent, coz I like to work in my own time, and it was like selling collages and clocks made from watch pass, must’ve seen them in the city, big bens, tower bridges, rolls Royce, yeah and I worked for a company called L-kursh, Lankursh but it was known as l-kursh, forest gate, the customers were like Selfridges, army and navy some big companies and I used to service them, I did very well over there, eventually the company went burst, erm I didn’t know I was working for a company that was in trouble at the time, and I was the resource that was keeping them, because I bought so many new customers and in the end eh the company closed, but the one of the directors company, the fonder, the founder of the companies daughter wanted to do business with me and we started, we wanted the same business in a separate way, and that what I did alongside with picture framing and the rest, and err eventually I opened this shop, twenty two years, yeah

### *And you’re still living in East Ham?*

### No, I live in Ilford

### *So when did you move to Ilford*

### Uhhhhh when did I move to Ilford? Nineteen eighty four yeah

### *And does your wife still work?*

### Oh no she works with me here, yeah we we, since we open the shop, since we have two children, that stories not been tact [he laughs] in our marriage we have two children yeah two boys, one has his own business ehh, both are educated, you they done masters, err with distinction and honours in Karss university, and the other one is with me, and he’s also trying to open his own business but he’s working at the moment, er my wife since we’ve had children she’s never worked and after they’ve grown she’s always helped me in the shop

### *Have you ever been back to Uganda?*

### No, I'm not thinking of going back to Uganda

### *Must’ve been quite a wrench, sorting of having to go somewhere and not have anything at all, and have to start again*

### Alot of people have gone back to Uganda but some are, that fear of unsafety is built in me and there is no need for me to go, if there was a need then it’s a different story, the people who actually have left their properties and money and again the greed has bought them back to Uganda.

### *Did they get any of it back*

### They have, most of them have got their properties back yes

### *Right right, did they get any compensation*

### I'm not really too much in depth, with what is happening recently, but er they were offered properties and I know one or two of them of my friends they have managed to get their properties back, yes

### *Must be very difficult for your wife and for your Father coz I suppose you were probably used to, servants, you know not servants but you know comfortable way of life*

### Yes

### *In Uganda and then to leave with absolutely nothing*

### We struggled but when you have god with you , that is not, not necessary, then you have everything, one must remember in the time of struggle or time of happiness if you balance your mind that they’re are both the same there is such much difference between them or there is no difference at all, but as as human beings we cannot say that we will see the difference, I’ll say, if you see it, if you balance it you won’t suffer that much, and I think my Father bought us up very well, we did suffer

### *Did he come over to the UK*

### No he stayed in Netherlands, he passed away

### *So that's really interesting, it’s very very interesting, so your time in the UK has it been good?*

### Yes, UK has given me everything, and I’ve given my best to the UK as well

### *You’ve had this shop for how long*

### Twenty years now

### *It’s quite a long time*

### Long time yes

### My wife and I, run this shop together, it was built from scratch

### *So you taught yourself all that you know...*

### No, we had this business back in Uganda you know, it’s just that, I did not utilise this scales, until I opened this business but my Father taught, whatever business he was doing, we had to know, we had to know, coz we used to sell watches we used to sell hi-fis, television whatever we were selling we were also repairing so, we were taught these skills

### *So you can repair watches?*

### Yes, hi-fi, television....i have lost the practise of that at the time, there is alot of new modern things but as for watches, yes yes, jewellery yes

### *Right right, and where do you get most of your jellewery is it from aboard or?*

### We get the them from Antigara, yes we buy it from eh suppliers in Antigara, they get them from aboard yes, we are only small jewellers we are not a very big jeweller so that we have to import jewellery

### *Well you know it’s still nice, you its*

### It’s not too bad, in twenty two years, what we done you know from scratch

### *That's the point isn’t it*

### Yeah, this was nothing before here, we built up. Business is not a you know a product

### *Do you know all your brothers and sisters come over to the UK from?*

### Yes, they’re all into business and employment, we have never depended on social security, were all hard working people, Asian people generally are very hard working people, especially those from Uganda

### *Well you did so well over there didn’t you, and that was through hard work*

### Yes, at one stage I remember, there was somewhere in the newspaper that there are about eighteen millionaires out of 100 and they are from Uganda and this country

### *I think was it seventy two thousand came over*

### Yes, and er well over thirty percent er taxes paid by Ugandan Asian in this country, so that is phenomenal

### *Absolutely absolutely*

### And speech from Prince Charles, some weeks ago, praising the Ugandan Asians was, did you hear that one?

### *I did, I did*

### Was again something to be proud of [police sirens]

### *Well I interviewed somebody a few weeks ago, who who erm, got an n-v-e and erm he was saying how erm,[police sirens] he met prince Charles and erm prince Philip and he got his NVE, and they congratulated him and said what a, you know, how beneficial it was for the UK, the Ugandan Asians coming over*

### Yes

### *So proud of that*

### Yes

### *Absolutely*

### The children have become doctors, solicitors, and many professional people, they are from Uganda

### *Which would be skills that we wouldn’t have*

### Well, we have a saying that, the world goes on, you don't have to think it depends on you, but if your there it helps, its

### *That's amazing, anyway thank you very very much for your time*

### 

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### The End

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**Interview details**

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**Project: Ugandan Asians**

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**Venue: interviewees shop**

**Name of interviewer: Judith Garfield**

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