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…remember the headmaster very well, but I understand that he got killed out there by XXX, didn’t he?

***Who?***

The headmaster.

***No no no, not him, it was a family member. He was uh… he came here for the education. When he was a teacher, an English teacher, he was my English teacher in Jinja. He came, got transferred, the government schools, but from Kampala to Jinja. Um. He was a really tough XXX, as far as English was concerned. Very, very particular about pronunciation, what the day is, this and that.***

*Sort of, very old school, sort of?*

***Yeah, more grammatical English than the colloquial terminology, so. He, he was the headmaster of uh, oh…***

Demonstration school.

***The demonstration school in Kampala again, when we have to apply for her, and that’s the same school. So she was forcing me and after some persuasion, she got the admission at that same school. And next to it was the teacher training school, this is where I lived. And next to it was the Uganda radio, and the National Theatre, and the African Organization Union, and Kampala Sports Club, purely whites, and then obviously, we would supply there. Um, later on, it was open for all, I mean that’s the vicinity we were living in Kampala then.***

*See it sounds like you were right in the middle of um, the capital, I mean it’s very, it’s not quite the upbringing you would have described, sort of the rural areas… do you remember being brought up in the city?*

I do, I remember we used to, in the evenings, we would go for a walk. And I remember, I mean I don’t know the name, but I remember a fountain, and it was a massive fountain, and in the evening there used to be different kinds of lights, and we used to make a point of going to see that. And that was beautiful. I remember the tall buildings, again it could be the place where the XXX, I have no idea, but I remember we used to go for a lot of walks. It was a done thing down there, in the evenings everybody used to be out walking, so I remember that. Those fun places… again, I don’t remember the names, or remember theschool very well, I remember the uniform I had, which was pink and white gingham skirt, and the white shirt, I remember that.

*It would be very fashionable today, gingham!*

Yeah, it’s very fashionable, it’s probably why I still wear like wearing them a lot. Um, but yeah, I remember the house that we lived in, uh, and I remember also the, when the problems started, when they were beginning to start, we moved further away from there because I think the, all the… we were more or less like cattle, weren’t we? Yeah, we were cattle. And we moved a bit further out, do you remember? We went and stayed in that daughter’s house?

***No, that- that was later on, that was very much later when people were given…***

That’s what I’m talking about, when the problems had just started.

***My, my friend, American daughter, he was doing cancer research in Uganda, and the American government was pouring in then about a million dollars a year for his research, um. Him being a Jew. So he was in problem. So he was keeping a low profile when the Jews were given… it was so sick, it was thirty days to leave.***

*Which was earlier as well, wasn’t it?*

***Obviously, I moved on with him, with my family. He, his family, go on, so we moved there with him. And he was gone, we were there… ah… going all over the east African countries sometimes, so we were away from there for a long time.***

*You used his house?*

***Whenever we came back, whatever long I said it was earlier, he shipped here. On American government’s money. Terrible. So we moved into… another – sort of European area, it was. It was isolated from the main city. It was not far from my Uganda fishnets, not far from there. It was hardly about five or ten minutes um… drive.***

*So it was a… you were in Kampala, um, in terms of growing up, I spoke to your dad about this in terms of… do you remember being different? I mean, do you remember being…*

Freer.

*Freer, yeah?*

A lot freer, yeah. Um, obviously being here, we didn’t understand about the problems and what was going on, but before the trouble started, I think that, you know, I suppose it’s the same as all children; I mean, nowadays, children know that “oh, that’s an African person, that’s an English person”, you know they can differentiate because that’s the way the world is now.

*They’re programmed to differentiate and divide.*

Yes. But we didn’t, I mean, we used to have servants, and my mum used to have an afternoon siesta, my dad would be back at work, we used to be outside playing with the uh, our house servants’ children, eating with them, you know, they used to make XXX, and I specifically remember eating with them after we had our lunch, and it was no different, no “you’re dirty or oh…” it was nothing like that. So much nicer. I think it’s a very simple way of life, even though it was rich in a different way, and that’s what I love about their… and the freedom. The freedom was there, and the communities mixed in so much, you know, dividing was… holidays were all celebrated together, it wasn’t like “this is our XXX, it has nothing to do with you”, everybody did it, but here it was just so different. And my youngest one, he goes to a private school in Buffer’s Hill, and he’s like, it’s a Catholic school, and there’s a lot of Muslims there, there’s a lot of Sikhs there as well, um… but he said “why don’t we celebrate Diwali at our school”, and it’s so hard to explain to a little kid that you’re not going to celebrate in school, you live in the UK…

*At a secular Catholic school.*

Yeah, so that’s, that’s a difference, and I always wish that they could have had, you know, they could have had that one experience back in Africa.

*A bit of freedom isn’t it. Simplicity of life, isn’t it, I suppose?*

Essentially. And I don’t know if it has anything to do with the child being care-free, but with me, I always felt… I don’t know, a bit different, because I always- I mean if you asked my brother two years younger than me, I don’t think he remembers anything at all. I always felt that there’s more to life, and even out in Africa always thought that there is more that I had to do, um, and when the problems started, I remember hearing – I remember we used to have a guy that used to patrol our house at night time, everybody used to have that, not so special such a thing to have, I remember him being attacked by the army. Him being shot. And my mum and dad shouting “stay still, don’t move, and don’t turn your lights on”, because otherwise obviously they could then see the reflections into the door and could start shooting. But I remember all that. I remember having to… um… yeah, when we left, it was me, my mum, my brother, and my youngest brother was just a couple of weeks old, you see. I remember our trip to Entebbe and we were sitting in the coach, and our coach got stopped. And the army got on, and they literally went round poking people- hm- hm- like this, just like you know, just jessing people hoping to evoke them and sort of, you know, start something so they would have an opportunity to shoot, I don’t know. They did get some people out, and they were on the floor, both knees, hands up, I remember all that. I remember being really, really scared thinking “it can’t, it can’t end for us here”. I remember thinking those kinds of things at that age. Um, I remember at the airport as well, uh, that a lady, a very, very heavily pregnant lady- we were only allowed to take a certain amount of gold. But people tried to smuggle that as much as they could, I mean, it’s just human nature. She had a lot on her, and she had bangles and bangles and gold necklaces and whathaveyou, and they took her in, and you know, and they searched her, and they took everything off her, and then they hit her, they beat her up. I remember seeing her on the floor crying. That’s how bad it was out there. And for me as a child to remember all that, you know, and my kids are all “no way, mum” you know, you can’t do that, and well, that was Africa, and well, you could. You could get away with murder out there.

*Especially in those days as well, I mean, you know, those times. I mean, it sounds quite horrific for a six year old-was it?*

Six years old, yeah.

*Um, do you um… you’ve talked about your relations with uh, the Africans before the tensions started as a child growing up in Kampala. You said you used to play with them. Did you ever feel different because of your ethnicity? I’ve asked about whether you felt different, and you never saw a dividing line.*

Never. Never, even when the problems started, um, I think there was so much XXX, uh, amongst some of the house and servants, they would come and tell us, you know, that there was a problem. I remember very vaguely that they would sometimes warn that there was going to be a problem, or you know, to stay indoors and pull your shutters down and don’t go out, and things like that. I remember those kinds of things, though they didn’t – I suppose they feared for their lives as well as they did for ours, um, Idi Amin didn’t give a damn.

*Yeah, he had proved previously that he was quite willing to aim at his own people, let alone people in a bigger community. Um, do you remember, I mean, the actual uh, I’m guessing you were six years old, the average six year old doesn’t watch the nine o’clock news, but do you remember the day of the declaration? Do you remember… do you have a sense of that? Perhaps a change of the environment growing up? After the declarations was there a certain increased tension?*

I.. I only picked up the tension from my parents because all of a sudden, you know, everything was being packed away, and I couldn’t really understand what was going on, and I don’t think my parents really told us that, you know, how do you tell a six year old, you know, you can’t. You just say “don’t worry”, you know, “we’re just going to a better place” and that was the end of it. But I think with me looking around and seeing that I knew a bit more than what they were telling me, and obviously, um, I speak to the house servants, and ask them, and you can hear them talking amongst themselves, so yeah, obviously you pick things up. But I just played dumb for my mum and dad’s sake so they didn’t have to worry about what I know. And I did know what was going on. I did… I was conscious – obviously even in the um, city if you were walking around... uh… if the army- the bizarre thing about it is if you see a truck of the army, and you could “oh look”, and all that thing that kids do, “oh my God it’s the army”, get really excited, but when you weren’t allowed to do that, you had to stop, exactly where you were, and stand and just face them. And it was almost like you had to salute them, you weren’t allowed to point at them, because it you pointed at them, they’ll come and ask you, they’ll give you problems, if you’re unlucky, they shoot you.

*Yeah, don’t draw any attention to yourself.*

No.

*Do you, um, in terms of, um, when you were, obviously the tension increased you moved home since you sensed a reaction, but could you perhaps go into a bit more detail about the process by which you left? Your dad told me you were booked on charter flights, you were briefly official refugees, yeah. But you still obviously experienced certain issues as you went to the airport. You just mentioned that, you went to the airport, was it coach, or was it private care, or…?*

Coach. We went on coach. I remember we went on the coach, and I remember my dad followed us down in a separate car with his cousin. Um, I was scared because I picked up the tension from my mum, so I was scared because I knew that something was not right, um… and she, she just prayed all the way down there, I could hear her, and I thought “right, okay, something’s not right here”, so she prayed all the way down there, and when we got to the – I remember when we got to the airport, apart from going through customs, and what happened to that woman, but I do remember walking up to the airplane and thinking to myself “wow, that’s a massive, massive bird.” We got on there, and as soon as the engines started, I just remember my mum just saying “thank you very much, we’re out of it”, but obviously, my dad, at the top of the airport, just waving us goodbye and not really understanding why he wasn’t coming with us. But at the same time too scared to ask my mum because I didn’t want to hear what she might say. So, yeah, and then the next thing we know, we’re in the UK, I don’t remember anything about the flight, don’t remember arriving to the UK, um, just remember the time we stayed with my mum’s brother in Gant’s Hill, and being all… being put into an English school, which is all very, very exciting because I went to school there with my cousin, and again, having to deal with a whole new curriculum really, um… The way that the school was, and really just getting sort of tucking your feet under and just getting on with it because that was it, you had to, you had no choice, there was nothing after this, you had to get used to this and get on with it now.

*It’s amazing how resilient children can actually be, isn’t it?*

Yeah, yeah.

*I suppose it, I mean, for me, as a child, I never went through the prejudice that you went through, but any new experience I just sort of saw as a new adventure…*

Exactly, exactly. You know if I look at my kids now, um, when I look at the youngest one, it’s… he’s very sensitive, and it’s almost like he’s got a very wise head on his shoulders as my oldest one, if you ever have a conversation with my oldest one, I listen to XXX XXX XXX and I just thing “where is he getting all this from”, um, and I felt like that as well. I felt like too old and wise for my age. Because I knew what was going on, but I never spoke about it, um. Because I didn’t want- I didn’t want to- I knew my parents were going through so much as it is, I mean, having to give up everything in Africa, our whole lives down in Africa to come to the UK, and then start all over again, with kids, it’s not easy. It’s not easy at all.

*Of course.*

So I just kept quiet and I just went along with it just to make life easier.

*Yeah, yeah, you were obviously quite burdened for a six year old. Did you um – in terms of coming to England, uh, and starting again, did you um, have any other Ugandan friends? Ugandan Asians community you had the use of?*

No. Just me.

*You had family over here though, you said that you…*

Uh, yeah, I mean, when we stayed – I mean my mum and dad, my mum’s brother, he would have been in the UK for quite a while, so they often associate themselves with Africa, as far as I was concerned, they were residents of the UK, and I had to get to know my cousin because I hadn’t seen her ever, and so they were like new family members to me. Uh, so it was a case of getting to know them, and they getting to make friends with me as well, so I had no connection to Africa at all, and anybody who would have come here.

*And I asked you a question earlier about whether you felt different in Kampala as an Asian uh, Ugandan Asian. Did you seem to feel different in England in Gant’s Hill as a, what I suppose technically would be a refugee, weren’t you? You were newcomer, certainly.*

I didn’t immediately, no.

*You didn’t have that sense or…*

I didn’t have that sense at all. Um, my adjustment at the school, I went to Gary’s, just in Gant’s Hill, because my cousin was going there. Um, I found that to be quite easy, um, the people were lovely, and I suppose the time being the seventies, you know, for youngsters, it was quite easy, um, I think as I grew up, as I got to know what was- how – you know – brutal people can be as far as being racist, and not that they were directed at me, I got away with murder as a youngster because yeah, I never – everybody knew I was Asian, um, and I was sticking around with skinheads and things like that… My dad would’ve killed me! You know, because all my friend, he’s doing this, and it’s like “hey, you’re alright”, and I’m like “God, you’re so ignorant”, you know, and this is me at the age of, you know, fourteen, fifteen years old, um, and I was into the music and the XXX and the ska and whathaveyou. And it’s just a time, it’s just then. And I used to see sometimes how they used to pick on people, on Asian people, and beat them up, and insult their eyes and XXX at them, and I used to get mad at them, you know, “I can’t believe you did that, I can’t believe you’re so ignorant, I can’t believe you’re so stupid, are all you white people stupid” you know. And I started to see what was wrong with you, you just don’t care. You just don’t get it. And I just never, ever, ever thought that I could make them understand, but that was just… a part of my life that came and went, so as I grew up, I adjusted, I just embraced everything as it came my way. But I found that as a child, obviously I made, I’ve made solid friends, um, I was allowed to go outside and play with them. Oh yeah, go out to play at eight or nine o’clock, because it was safe, you know, in those days, let’s go XXX around the block and play skipping down the road, my mom would never come out and say to my uncle you know “where is she”, you know, it was fine. And all of a sudden… I think from maybe about ’77 to ’78, it was like “no, you can’t go out front anymore”. Because big times had changed, things had changed, I remember the National Front used to march down this road, you know, we’ve got, you know, so many Jewish people living down this road. And they used to march down outside, XXX you know these National Front people would be singing, you know who they were, so you look out – you couldn’t – because you knew what they were all about, you know, you used to actually see some of them walking down with their… the white masks, you know, almost, you know, is that the Ku Klux Klan come back to the UK? It was awful, but I’ve seen all that when it came down here I just couldn’t understand what was going on. And then comparing it to my life in Africa and them being bitter that I’ve had to face all this here, and for us to have been there… I wouldn’t have to face anything like that.

*Life would have been a bit simple.*

Yeah, I would have had a normal upbringing, really.

*Yeah, the upbringing was over here, your parents talked about it as well. You’re aware, I mean, so you did arrive in England at quite a tense time, for your age, also for England so- in terms of society. Quite a tense time. The economy was not very integratist, and quite a lot of racist tension around the country. Um, when- at what point did you feel like England had become home? Did you ever, is there a point where you remember that, or was that just a natural process?*

It is a natural process. I don’t think there was ever a day that I stopped and said to myself “yes, this is now my home”. Up to this day, to this minute, I’ve never actually said that. I haven’t. Um, of course, it is my home, because I don’t know any different, I’ve been – I have been back to Africa, it’s very different now, being brought up in the UK, it’s a very, very fast life here, very, very fast, uh, you do not stop until you drop, literally. You go into Africa, and you’re like “hm, what can I do now?” it is so slow, it drives me mad, so I could never go back there to live there because I could never go backwards. For someone to come from Kenya to this country and start picking up the speed, it’s probably a lot easier than to go back and slow down. I couldn’t do it.

*So you said to me although you never chose England as a home, it almost chose you, it formed you from a very young age.*

Yeah, I had to embrace it, just move along with changes, just had to, otherwise, you know, if you’ve XXX back again, you just become very, very different person.

*Yeah, completely, completely, it affects you, the way you’re formed as a person. Um, so you um, you’ve spoken about sort of, your first impressions at school, and hanging out with your cousin, and hanging around your skinhead friends [laughs], it paints a wonderful picture, uh… what were your first impressions, generally about England?*

Cold. It was cold, it was very, very foggy when we came here, um, and it was very, very cold. I remember the first thing that my uncle did was take us, it used to be called uh, CMA, was it CMA back then?

*Yes, it was.*

He took us there and sort of helped –

***CMA.***

Yeah, he took us there, and put us on a coat, and I was like “what is this?”, you know, “you come from such a lovely country, and now all of a sudden I have to cover myself up in the cold”. But I just remember it just being really miserable and cold.

*So you didn’t bring that jacket from Uganda, did you?*

No, unfortunately not. [laughs]

*Um, so um, did you um, let’s talk about your upbringing here. You went to school, primary school. Where did you go to secondary school?*

XXX County for Girls, which is just next to Valentine’s Heart, which is another Valentine’s school. Yeah, I was there, that was an all girls’ school, and I think that, and the year after I stayed, they became a mixed school, and other Valentine’s school. Yeah, I was there, and again, you know, obviously, I’m the only Asian in the class. The only Asian in the class, and then there were, I think, half of the year another Asian girl came, I think her name was Sukji, and I remember her, typically Asian, middle parting too, and I was “who the hell is that?”, and there is my XXX hair. I imagine my mum used to get angry with me, you know, “don’t tie your hair up” and things like that, I’d walk around the corner and do my ponytail, you know…

*I get the impression she was a bit of a nightmare as a teenager?*

Was I? He probably shouldn’t answer that.

*No comment.*

No comment, yeah. A bit rebellious, I think, because I think for me to deal with the east and west, it was very, very difficult. You grew like that, but I think it was for…

[indistinct chatter from a fourth person in the room]

*Yes, of course. I suppose it’s just – in a way, you, you moved to a new environment, you kind of want to fit in as well, don’t you? So you want to wear what all the other girls were wearing.*

Well, no it’s not. I mean, clothes wise, don’t get me wrong, my parents never restricted me. But I think it was, if it was just me, I think I wasn’t… I wasn’t – I felt that I didn’t have an opportunity to express myself, um, and the times were so different, you know, if your parents said “you can’t do this”, then “why can’t we just”… “I’ve said it, that’s it”. You know? But for my kids, if they said “mum, why can’t we do that?”, I’ll give them a whole full spiel, you know, “this is the reason why, and that, and that, and that, and that, now tell me if I’m being unreasonable”. So you know, I’m doing that because I was never given that, and that’s because my parents were never given that by their parents. It’s just, you know, um, but for me, I was very frustrated, you know, I felt very, very trapped, I had my English friends, and I had my Asian life at home, yeah, my friends all went out, I wasn’t allowed to do that, um, you know they would come to school and they’d say “oh, we did this, we did that”, and I’m thinking “yeah, okay”, and I just ended up listening about it. I was never bitter about it, but I felt like I missed out on so much, um, and up to a certain degree, I became a bit rebellious, um, but not to a scale that I was a nightmare.

*Going off track. I suppose, I mean, it adds to – you already said, you know, you’ve always had this sense growing up, and even as an adult, there is always that ‘what could have been’, like that gap in Africa, where your life was taken away from you, and then you get here, and you kind of, you’re in this western environment where you’re not quite, perhaps, enjoying the same things as the white kids are.*

It’s a freedom.

*So again, you kind of feel like that’s a gap in your life as well.*

Massive.

*So you might have felt kind of stuck in between.*

It’s stuck in between, but I think the whole thing about it was the freedom, um, not getting my freedom, and I’m sure I would have had it if I had still stayed out there, and that was, to me, just trying to break out all the time, because I wanted my freedom, and I couldn’t fully get it here, and even though I understood why, I was always up on the “woe is me, why me”. You know, so as a child, I suppose, when you’re battling so many things, you can be quite… quite um, sensitive, and you can… yeah, and it’s always about “I’m the victim”, XXX sort of thing, whenever I think about it now, it’s kind of pathetic, but there you go. [laughs]

*I think you could have, I would probably say every teenager on this planet has said “why, woe is me” at one point.*

Exactly.

*“Everyone else can do everything except me!” [laughs] Um, you sort of, um, you’ve talked about now, perhaps, the Ugandan Asian experience in general, um, and as I’ve said to you before, you were, you know, part of this project is really about celebration of the Ugandan Asian community’s achievements, and it seems to me you’re very proud of your family, not only what they’ve done in Uganda, but also the way they’ve come to England and basically started again, I suppose, and fought to establish this life that you’ve um, enjoyed growing up.*

Absolutely. It’s really strange you said that because I mean, this morning I had a conversation with my son about it, because he’s fully aware that I’m doing all this, and uh, my husband, my husband was talking to him about you know, the economy, and you know, you’ve got your own business in the fashion industry, you know… there’s businesses out there that have been running for hundreds of years that are going down, you know, we’re just a small fish in a big sea, you know, we don’t know what’s going to happen tomorrow, we’ve got to pull our weight, you know… And his family is from India, and his family is very, his grandparents had it very different to mine, whereas I’ve come from riches, and not only financially, not only through industry, but through family, whereas him, his grandparents haven’t. They’ve come from poverty and a lot of segregation. So he doesn’t understand, um, what I’m all about. I don’t think he ever would do, because he’s never experienced it, and obviously, like I said, you know, your parents always pass on what they’ve been taught, so I think if his parents never got it, then they would never pass it on to him anyway. But he did say to my son anyway that you know, I suppose, you know, uh, “times have changed, and your mum- your mum’s grandfather was a mayor of Nairobi, and she’s come from riches, I can’t let her down”, and it’s almost like, you know, I’m not that sort of person, I’m not a material person. To me, richness is your family, not money, you know, and he doesn’t seem to understand that. So, it’s… to my son, if he turned around and said to me, you know, but that’s not the point. And he said exactly what I said to you, “richness is having a family, you can live without money, but as long as you’ve got the family, that’s all that matters”, and that’s what my parents taught me, and that’s what my grandparents taught us. So for him to be saying that, it does make me very, very proud that he’s going to pass that on to the next generation.

*That’s amazing, um, to see your child at such a young age have that appreciation, to have a pretty balanced perspective.*

Yeah. Well, he’s only fourteen years old, but you know.

*I still, I’m still a child of twenty four, and I don’t think I’ve got such a balanced perspective of the world, I mean that’s… uh, certainly advanced for his age. Um, do you – in terms of, um, your identity, I mean, how do you see yourself? Do you see yourself as British Ugandan Asian, do you see someone who used to be a migrant who is now fully become a British citizen, I mean, how do you see yourself and your cultural identity?*

British Ugandan Asian. Yeah, that’s… that’s me, because that’s my roots. That is, Uganda is my roots, and um, nah, I’ve always had a British passport, yes, I am British, but, I’m from Uganda. Yeah.

*And do you, um, in terms of your children’s identity, you seem to have… they, obviously have a different upbringing to you, they didn’t have those first six years in a very exotic, um, sure, thousands of miles away. Um, do you think they are aware of what their grandparents and…*

My son, yeah. I would love for you to meet him, he- he I very passionate, he’s very close to my parents, and he does have long conversations with my dad, and I said to him, you know, when I was here on Tuesday, and I said to him “did you know that granddad used to actually converse not in English”, “yeah I know”, and I said “how the hell do you know”, and he said as if I only just found out now, as if this is something that me and my dad never spoke of, he goes “mum, well you know, I just speak to granddad quite a lot”, and I go “yeah, that’s very cavalier” and I’m thinking “oh my God”, so he… they know the history about it, they understand, and my son always says to me, you know, how XXX to granddad for leaving everything there. And then he’ll calm me down, and then he’ll start again and say “because that is the most- hardest thing to do”, as opposed to setting up and starting a business, you know, which is again, referring to conversations he was having with his father last night, um, and he goes “I don’t think anybody would ever really understand that unless you’ve been through it”. And he goes “I don’t understand it either, but I appreciate it, because I’ve been brought up listening to it, so I can understand what you’re coming from.”

*To have worked so hard to achieve something and for it to be taken away from you, and then to pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and start that journey again, and then to achieve that level…*

And on the children, it’s so much harder…

*And in different environments as well, I mean, it’s one thing learning the process of making money in east Africa if you’re part of that culture, to be suddenly dumped, you know, so many thousands of miles away, and leave that culture with nothing, and starting again, I mean, it’s a different, you know, it’s almost as if you’ve become rich for a second time, but in a very different way, and that’s even more admirable.*

Yes it is, yeah, which is what my son always says, and my daughter as well.

*Why do you think, um, the Ugandan Asian um, community is such a success story?*

I think, I think people have kept the whole – situation alive. They – and because of the community that we had back there, it doesn’t matter what’s happened after ’72, where people have gone, I think a lot of people have made a lot of effort to keep in touch with one another. I mean, I’m on those, you know, on Facebook, the Ugandan Asian ’72 and Asians who’ve left the exodus, and blah blah blah… When you actually read um, what they, and how they keep in touch, I mean, one guy is in Texas, and he keeps in touch with a friend in the UK, and they try to meet up, you know, once a year. I think that’s fantastic, um, and I think it’s down to the people, individuals, for keeping it alive, because obviously, what they had back there, I don’t think they’ll ever be able to get back.

*But they need to fill the gap somehow, and that’s opening methods of communication…*

Yeah, that’s all the talk about- they go back, they go back to Africa, they get the photographs, they come back and share it, and they share it about the past history, and they share about today, and posting old pictures, I mean I do as well. You know, it’s just a trigger of memories, and a trigger of- I mean, I’ve made friends with so many people who knew, who know my dad, and I said you know, “I want to accept you on the Facebook page so you can keep in touch with other people as well”. What a great way to keep in touch with people if you can’t hop on a plane and go and see them, that’s the next best way.

*Definitely. I mean, and back in Britain, um… Because I mean, it is true, I mean the British Ugandan Asian community seems reasonably successful, I’m sure this is probably equivalent to the great you in Canada, sitting opposite to you in Canada, saying why is this such a success story in Canada, and America, and Australia, and all the Scandinavian countries, I mean, why do you think they are so successful at business and, I think culturally they’ve adapted so quickly to Britain, it’s not just about the celebration, what… why do you think that the Ugandan Asian community is revered, even amongst, sort of, the Tory party, who are pretty anti immigrant, they still hold you up as this pedestal of “this is the way immigration should be done, this is”… you know, people argue that for all the anti-arguments against immigrants coming here, and taking our money, taking our lives, taking our jobs, these ridiculous arguments that are never actually proven.*

Yeah, I mean that still happens now with the Polish that are here.

*Exactly.*

Now it’s sort of…

*Even people would traditionally argue against immigrants would still have to put their hands up and say “actually, Ugandan Asians, they did work out”.*

Prince Charles said it.

*Yes, he did.*

I mean, I’ve seen, listen, I’ll go straight down to the basics, where as far as I’m concerned, I’ve seen how hard my grandparents worked. I’ve seen how hard my mum and dad worked. I’ve, I’ve been at work as well, and obviously, I worked six years ago when I had my youngest one, you know, if I had to go back to work tomorrow, I could do it like this. It’s what we’ve all been brought up with. I don’t know, I think the Asian community, I’m not put… I don’t know what it is... I mean, I as a person am not a quitter. It doesn’t have anything to do with being proud or anything to do with that, it’s just to do with survival. Um, we’d do anything to you know, for the sake of our family, we don’t quit. A lot of them have got business minds as well, a lot of Asian people are very business minded. I don’t know what it is. I mean, everyone that I speak to, every Asian person I speak to, they are all… want to do something really good for themselves to make it easier, life for themselves.

*I think you sort of… I mean, it’s one of those questions without really an answer, is it.*

There isn’t an answer, everyone will give you a different answer.

*What I will say is, I mean, the two things you touched on seem to be quite predominant, um and that is one: hard work. And that’s not just the Ugandan Asian community, but the Asian community as a whole, most certainly. I mean, growing up, I always remember Mr Shahm, the guy who ran the corner shop at the end of my street, I mean, I used to… My dad would get home from work and 5:30 and pick up the paper from him, so he’d open the bar for him, and I’d sort of stick my head out the window at 9:00 as I went to bed as an eight year old, and then you’d see him turn the lights off at half-nine. So these guys were working seventeen hours a day. I think it is hard work, but also, you just said to me, yeah, the entrepreneurial spirit that a lot of your community brought from Uganda seemed to allow, ready themselves a lot quicker when they did get to Britain, they did want to start their own business, they had that sort of, almost entrepreneurial sort of knowledge and that spirit to make money.*

And they will do anything. They’re not like “nah, I won’t do that”, they do anything. And I think also, it’s got a lot to do with upholding the family name, that’s I think has got a massive part to do with- I mean, my son says to me “I want to make my grandparents proud”, and he says, “my grandparents”, and I don’t say “my grandparents”, I say “my parents”, so it’s always sort of… we skip a generation going backwards. And I go “what about me?” and he goes “no, you’re alright, I want to go out and make my grandmother and my grandfather proud of me.” And I thought that was strange because I would say that to my mum and dad, I want to make my grandparents proud. So, it is, it is to do with the family name as well. Uh, and I think it’s nice that some of it – well, yes some of the kids still have that, because a lot of people don’t know their family history, they’re not interested. And it’s frightening because we find that with the next generation, a lot of them will go back to their roots, and you know, you won’t hear about the Ugandan Asians of 1972, it will just be washed right… Because the next generation are just more interested in what… there’s a lot of people out there that aren’t going to give a damn.

*Yeah, there’s that gap. I mean, to be honest, you’re probably the third or fourth person I’ve met who’s sort of, went through the process as a child, but were sort of like, the next generation of their parents who went fully went for the XXX expression as adults. And um, I think you’re not the first person to say that there’s a fear, um, they all seem to acknowledge that their children broaden the gap. I mean I think that you’re the first one to tell me they’ve got children who are actually aware of it.*

Oh, my kids are, I make sure.

*But see, that’s because you’re quite unique within the community, so since you’re driven…*

I do, I do, I mean, not so long ago, probably last October, XXX exiled Asians from Uganda; it was just a XXX for now…

*A TV documentary, I think.*

Yeah, it was on a Sunday morning, and I recorded it on my planner, and you watch that, and if you watch half an hour, and if you understand where I come from, I made them watch it. And it’s still on there, my son still hasn’t seen it, but he’s intending to see it. I would have loved for him to see it, and he knows it.

*Not getting birthday presents until… [laughs]*

Sit him down on the sofa.

*Let’s talk about you going back to, um, Africa. Um, when was the last time you went back, uh, as an adult perhaps?*

Oh my God, I went back in uh, 1986?

***1987***

1987? 1987 I went back, yeah.

*Did you go back together?*

On my own.

*You went on your own? Wow. And what was that experience like?*

Um, I was in Tanzania, um… No. It was just not me. It was um… Obviously, in the UK, uh, I guess life goes too fast and I’m not – I don’t sit and do nothing, I’m a get-up-and-go-er, I have to keep myself busy, and there again, house servants, you got up and breakfast was ready for you XXX you know, you go out, do what you need to do, come home, and lunch is ready for you, it used to drive me mad. You know, I just felt brain dead when I was out there. I didn’t enjoy it. Loved the weather, went to Mumbasa, did all that, loved the weather, but yeah, it definitely wasn’t my cup of tea any more.

*Sounds a little bit claustrophobic almost, compared to the freedom you had had, growing up in England, perhaps, or as a child.*

Exactly, exactly.

*And when was the first time you went back to Uganda, or have you been back?*

I have not been back.

*Right I remember. Do you think that’s… do you think you need to do that?*

No.

*It’s not something you would entertain?*

No. I’ve seen my photographs. My dad went back a few years ago, and I saw the photographs, and um… it broke my heart.

*Really?*

Yeah, it did. Seeing the houses and thinking “well, that’s not our house any more”, um I don’t want to go back and see the way it is now, I want to remember the way I remembered it, and just keep the fond memories and leave it at that. Don’t want to go back now.

*And how about your children, do you think you’d want them to see where their mum and their grandparents come from, or do you just not see it as the same place any more?*

It’s not. There’s no- there’s no point in me taking them back to something that’s totally changed, um, because it’s not my mum and dad’s, my grandparents’ house any more. Um, they’ve seen the photographs, um, and I’ll take them back to Africa, to experience the whole African lifestyle, but… as I say, I wouldn’t take them back for anything else. I would definitely wouldn’t take them to Uganda. I definitely wouldn’t take them.

*Yeah, that’s fair enough. Um, and do you often imagine what your life would have been if you had stayed there? And do you think you would have been a very different person, or…?*

Yes. Yeah. Yeah, definitely, I would have been a very different person. Don’t forget, I was brought up in the UK, um, even though in the, in Africa, um, you know, most of my friends were still British ex-patriots’ kids. Um, I still had a choice there between, you know, the Asian life and mixing with my ethnic difference… I would have…. Obviously I would have a lot more Asian… Here, it’s very, very hard, it is very, very hard, and I think it is hard for the kids as well, even though it’s easy for them, because they don’t know any different, but I see things that children, that my kids don’t understand, and it… I think if they were out in Africa, they would probably XXX with me as well. It’s very, very hard to explain. You ask somebody else the same question, um, they would probably give you the same answer but from a totally different perspective. Um… And I think I would be a lot happier if I was out there as well.

*Yeah. I mean the way you described it when you first started the interview, there was a certain, almost, innocence about the place that I…*

The innocence of freedom. It is a freedom, you know, you just look at everybody, and there was no… you know… nastiness between anyone at all, you know, you just felt the love in everything. It’s really, really bizarre. XXX in this country, everybody’s out to just knock you out, you know? It’s horrible, horrible country.

*Kill or be killed, almost mentality, compared to something with a more… pace... Um, what do you think of, in terms of the commemoration of the Ugandan Asian experience. How much do you think- how should it be celebrated? Because you, as you’ve said, you are quite aware, this could be the last times members of a certain generation can celebrate. Do you think there’s a sense that the community should come together?*

A massive reunion. With everyone that could be would be there. I would be great. I think it would be wonderful for my mum and dad, yeah. To be able to see, meet people that they haven’t spoken to since 1972.

*Yeah, just try to get that community back together.*

I think that would be wonderful, yeah.

*Do you think-*

That’s the way to celebrate it.

*Do you think that’s the greatest, sort of, tragedy of this story, is that you know, I mean, you’ve already told me that you went through quite horrific experiences on the way to the airport, you witnessed servants and people you’re familiar with beaten, be shot, and obviously some noises in the street, and you have to be back to your house, et cetera, but do you think – obviously, that’s a tragedy in itself, but do you think, sort of, the greatest tragedy of this entire story is the fact that, you know, you had an entire community basically ripped apart and sent to the four corners of the globe?*

Yeah, he wasn’t God, he had no right to take away my lifestyle. And he did. He did it, you know? Just like that. Nobody should have that right. And that’s what I’m very bitter about.

*And with this, sort of, lead on to the final topic that I always touch on, and that is Mr Amin. I mean, I always do XXX, and I don’t know if this might sounds as a preposterous question, I don’t mean to sound jovial, but you know, if you’re sitting in my place now, if you did have that luxury to sit across a table from him, stare him in the eye.*

I would shoot him. I would shoot him, yeah.

*What would be – before you shoot him – what the message to him, what words… because I do sense this bitterness, there is the anger that’s still there with you, isn’t it?*

That has always been there, yeah. I would ask him why. I would ask him who the hell does he think he is. Because he’s not a god, I don’t think anybody – it’s like I’m bitter towards what Hitler did to all the Jews. You know, who the hell was he? I don’t think anybody should have that kind of power, Lord knows what happens when you have that kind of power. And, um, what he did, he did, he had no reason, no right, and that’s what I’m bitter about. Because he took away what was ours. No one should have that right. Nobody.

*And you talk about that… that place that’s still got a connection in your heart.*

That was our home, yeah.

*That place where little six year old XXX used to run around at night.*

He basically took my life away. Basically, that’s what he did. And he didn’t give me a choice, I had to come here and make a life for myself as did my parents, and he didn’t have any right to do that at all. None whatsoever.

*And you’re certain the success of your life here has nothing to do with him anyway?*

Nothing. We had to be a success, we didn’t have a choice. You know, it was a, you know, fight for survival, we had to do it. No choice. And that was his fault. He took our choice away.

*I think that’s one hell of a message that you can send to him. Um, Veena, thank you very much that’s wonderful.*

You’re welcome.

*I appreciate this and I’m going to stop.*

### The End

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