



Video Story Transcript

My Parents' Three Migrations

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Link to YouTube Video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJjHMc_s70

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

So, my name is Kiran Singh Sirah. And this story is about my parents.

How do you eat a mango? You hold a mango in your hands, you caress it, you squeeze it, and you soften the pulp from the mango, and then you suck out the juice from the middle. I know how to eat mango because my parents told me how to eat a mango. They came to Britain in 1972 from Uganda as Ugandan refugees, and I was born in England. But they told me how to eat the mango because that's what they did in Uganda. Mangoes flourished in their garden. And we eat mangos every day. But there are so many other stories from Uganda and Kenya.

There were stories about how my mother, when she grew up, she was sitting in an elementary classroom, and she picked... a cobra, walked into, came into the classroom, and she picked up a hockey stick and killed the cobra. And still to this day, that cobra is in a jar and in the school museum with a label on it, "Killed by Pravina Korga Tora." There were so many other stories from East Africa, from Kenya, and Uganda, where my family grew up. Stories about how they'd make popcorn and go to the drive-in cinema. Or stories of how they would pick food from the garden and make bugga or baquarda, bagia. Or how they make African food and combine that with Indian ingredients like ugali.

There was even a story once that my mother told me that the Bisaya people used to come on trains with vegetables and fruit and sell these vegetables to the houses. And one day, a young boy was knocking at the door to sell vegetables. And my grandma opened the door and invited this young boy in. And he became a friend of the family and as he grew up with my mother.

There was a story about my grandfather that one day, he looked out and he saw so many people walking past thirsty, they had no water. So, he went out with his own hands, he built a well so they could drink fresh clean water. There are many stories such as this and I know them because my parents told them to me and I had never been to Uganda.

But in 1972, in the summertime, Idi Amin, the then dictator of Uganda, announced on public radio, that Ugandan Asians had to leave the country in three months or they be executed. Now, you can imagine the panic. People were scared. But they had no time to fuss around. They had to pack up what they could, put their possessions into bags, and then leave the country, or obtain the visas so they could leave the country. A sociologist once described my people as the thrice migrant community. A community of people that had migrated across three continents in one lifetime. Thousands fled the borders. Some moved back into Kenya or Malawi or Tanzania. Well, my family were kind of lucky because they were born as British citizens. Originally, my grandparents came from India to East Africa to build the railroads from Mombasa to Jinja, the source of the Nile. The British needed the British railroads to keep control of the British Empire. They needed an access from the sea to the source of the Nile, to keep control of the Suez Canal. So, they sent for migrant Indian skilled workers to do this. And when it became an independent country, both Kenya and Uganda, the Ugandan Asians, they stayed and they settled and made Uganda their home.

On route to Britain, though, in the winter of 1972, things weren't all that rosy. When the plane tried to land at Luton Airport, the airport was stormed by far right fascist groups that tried to stop the immigrants from coming into the country. And this was spurred by Enoch Powell's "The Rivers of Blood" speech. Enoch Powell was a politician that talked about the blood of migrants is going to ruin our country. Many of the refugees settled in refugee camps. But my father got word, because he was a young architect in Uganda, that sister branch in a town called Eastbourne, sent word that any Ugandan refugees that were going to come to England had a promise of a job. So, my parents moved to Eastbourne.

The front page of the headline of the Eastbourne Herald Newspaper read, Uga, "Eastbourne Welcomes Ugandan Refugees," and there was a picture on it of my parents. A young, cool Indian couple. My father wore a bright red turban. My mum even, even bright red sari and they carried a little baby, my older brother.

Eastbourne was where they grew up. It was also where I was born. It was a town that welcomed my family in. There was so many stories about those early years. I remember, my dad told me once, when he was walking down the Eastbourne promenade, a young boy called out, "Look mum, aliens!" My dad loves to tell that story. I once asked my dad what was it like. You left Uganda at gunpoint. You came to England, you had, your plane had to reroute. You started a new life. You had no possessions, no houses, hardly any money. The only money they brought into the country was jew... wedding jewelry, stuffed into my brother's diaper. They had to start life from scratch. Must've been really difficult.

And my dad was like, “No, Son, it was fun. It was an adventure. And you know why? Because we're doing it together. We had a sense of community. We helped each other out.”

When they came to Britain, alls they had was minimal possessions but what they did have was the power of the stories that are passed on to them and the power of stories that they passed on to me. I'm so grateful for the stories that were passed on to me by my parents. And the strength and this belief that I believe. That to tell a story in this world is more than a human right. It's actually an act of love that can change the world. And I'm grateful for the stories that have changed my world and made me realize the person I could be.