

### Mohamed Family

# Grateful for new start in Milton after escape from Amin's Uganda

by Ann Hauprich-Nielsen  
Leaving one's homeland to start a new life in another country is an emotionally trying experience at the best of times.

But to depart from all that is familiar with only the clothes on your back—knowing that your life is in danger and you may never be able to return—is something worse. It's traumatic.

Such was the situation when the Gaff Mohamed Family fled Uganda shortly after Idi Amin came to power in the early 1970s.

Four years ago and though four years have passed since their exodus from the politically terrorized African nation, memories of long months of separation and fear for those left behind linger on.

The story of the Mohameds—who now live in a Milton townhouse development—is one of courage and perseverance and, according to them, even some small "miracles."

Naj and Gaff Mohamed had been married 10 years and had three small children—a son, Riyaz, and two daughters, Rizpa and Rania—when they decided to flee Uganda and seek refuge elsewhere in the summer of 1972.

How it was: At the time, Mr. Mohamed enjoyed a top position with East African Airlines and had an active home and social life in the community of Entebbe.

The family resided in a huge, lavishly furnished bungalow on Lake Victoria surrounded by several acres of private gardens. A "paradise" is how they remember it.

The lawns and gardens were looked after by an 18-year-old lad named "Daki" who later became the family cook as well.

A young woman called "Maria" was employed as governess for the children. She came to work for the Mohameds shortly after Riyaz was born, and, according to Mr. and Mrs. Mohamed both she and "Daki" were like members of the family.

Involved: A community-minded individual, Mr. Mohamed was charter president of the Lions Club in Entebbe. He was also chairman of the city's PTA for several years and belonged to Entebbe Institute.

Both he and wife, Jan (pronounced "Nadge"), were members of the Interline Airlines Club based in Kampala and travelled widely throughout Kenya and Tanzania.

Much of their leisure time together was spent with friends on the golf course or swimming in the nearby lake.

Mrs. Mohamed occasionally took the children on vacations to such exotic places as Cairo, Egypt, when her husband was away on business for extended periods of time.

Life was good and they wanted for nothing.

Upheaval: But as tensions grew in neighboring African countries during the late 1960s, they began to contemplate a move to a more politically stable environment—like Canada. They did not want their children to grow up in a nation surrounded by upheaval and political unrest.

In Mr. Mohamed's words: "We had considered leaving Uganda before 1972, but never dreamed we would leave under the circumstances we did."

They had hoped, at least, to emigrate as a family—and to

be allowed to take their money and certain possessions with them when they made the move.

But Idi Amin and his armies had other plans for defectors.

Three months: General Amin gave 80,000 people—most of them British subjects—exactly three months to leave Uganda effective June 6, 1972.

Each family was told they could take the equivalent of \$100 with them when they left Uganda.

The Mohameds departed from their homeland absolutely penniless, however—the result of a bureaucratic faux pas.

Everything they now possess has been accumulated through four years of hard work and sacrifice in this country.

To England

The first to leave Uganda was Mrs. Mohamed—together with the children—in August 1972. The youngsters were then aged eight, six and five.

Though a native of Uganda, Mrs. Mohamed was permitted to join relatives living in England with relative ease. This was because her passport identified her as a "British subject."

(This is one of the small "miracles" to which the Mohameds refer. They said a request to change her status to "Ugandan" when the country gained independence and Amin rose to power was turned down by a friend in the immigration department who had some foresight into the events that were to come. Mr. Mohamed had his status changed to "citizen of Uganda"—and consequently had a much more difficult time leaving the country.)

No good-byes: Although Mr. Mohamed was at the airport the day his wife and children left, no good-byes were said.

The children were instructed by their father ahead of time to walk straight past him onto their plane. Under no circumstances were they to let on that they knew him.

His own life was in jeopardy—and he didn't want the soldiers to know his family was leaving.

"I was crying on the inside, but I had to be strong," Mrs. Mohamed said. "I couldn't let the children see how upset I was for fear they would break down, too."

Letters censored: "I could see Maria and Daki waving to us from the visitor's deck," she recalled. "They were crying very hard. I still think of them often and wonder what's happened to

them."

(Mrs. Mohamed said she's written to Daki, Maria and several other friends since leaving Uganda, but has never received any replies. This is because the government censors all of the mail coming into and leaving the country.)

And so it happened that Mrs. Mohamed and the children arrived safely in Britain in the summer of 1972 with one suit case apiece and a few identifying papers in hand—but no money.

"I managed to grab my marriage license, the children's birth certificates and a few favorite photographs before leaving, but that was it," she said.

Nightmares

Her brother (who had settled in England a few years earlier) took the fatherless family under his wing—and saw to it the children were enrolled in British schools.

Similarly, Mrs. Mohamed wasted no time in finding a job so she could earn her keep. Within two weeks of her arrival in London, she was employed in the government's social security department—a position she kept until Gaff called for her and the children to come to Canada in June 1973.

Still, it was an emotionally upsetting time for Mrs. Mohamed and the children. "They would wake up in the middle of the night screaming for their father and ask when he would be coming," she said.

In fact, the youngsters missed their father so much, they became physically ill.

Children sick: "I brought them to a doctor in London to find out why they were so sick," Mrs. Mohamed recalled. "He told me there was no biological reason for their poor health. He suggested it was a result of the psychological strain they'd been under—and sure enough, when they were united with Gaff they became themselves again!"

During their first two months apart, the Mohameds were unable to communicate because of the censorship—and fear that Ugandan authorities would prevent Mr. Mohamed from leaving the country.

And though he managed to get out in November 1972 and write to Naj and the children that he had arrived safely in Canada, Mr. Mohamed and the family were not reunited until several months later.

Manpower: As Mr. Mohamed had some relatives living in the Toronto area, he stayed with them

during his first winter and spring in Canada.

Penniless—as his wife had been upon arrival in England—Mr. Mohamed set out looking for work almost immediately.

He was advised by immigration authorities to seek out a job through Manpower, but he found that to be a useless avenue of pursuit.

Every morning for the first 10 days, he got up early in the morning and took the train to the Manpower office—dressed in his only salvaged suit.

But everyday the story was the same. It seemed no matter what time he arrived he was always "too early" or "to late" to apply for the position he sought.

"Aggressive"

Mr. Mohamed soon tired of the treatment he was receiving and decided the only way he was ever going to get a job that interested him in Toronto was to be aggressive.

So he found his way to Toronto International Airport one chilly morning and made up his mind not to stop "pestering" them there until he was promised employment.

"I had almost 20 years of experience working with airlines and I wasn't going to let it go down the drain," he said. His perseverance paid off.

Two weeks after he filed his initial application at the airport, he received word that Air Canada could use him as a cargo agent.

A needed break: Though it was a far cry from the position he'd once enjoyed with East African Airlines, Mr. Mohamed was overjoyed.

It was, he knew, the break he needed. A start in the right direction.

For the next seven months, Mr. Mohamed worked and sacrificed with thoughts only of how many things he needed to buy before Naj and the children could join him.

"My family had everything they could ever want in Entebbe. I couldn't let them come here and have nothing," he said.

Wrote daily: With the goal of securing a comfortable life for his family in mind, Mr. Mohamed skipped meals, worked overtime and spent the absolute minimum on entertainment or anything other than the basic

necessities for himself.

"I used to write to Naj every single day," he said. "And though I missed her and the kids terribly and worried if I didn't hear from them for a few days, I couldn't allow myself the luxury of an overseas phone call. I knew I'd need the money more when they joined me here."

By June he could stand the separation no longer, however, and also felt financially secure. He decided it was time to send for the family in England.

Reunited

Having saved up "days off" and rearranging shifts with some friends at the airport, Mr. Mohamed was able to give Naj and the children his undivided attention during their first days in Canada.

One of the first places he took the family was to the CNE followed by trips to Ontario Place, Black Creek Pioneer Village and other places of entertainment for youngsters their age.

Shortly after the "holiday reunion," Mrs. Mohamed landed a part-time job as a passenger agent with Air Canada, and between their two salaries, the Mohameds soon saved enough money for the downpayment on their present Milton home.

Promotion: An added financial boost came when Mr. Mohamed was promoted to "flight dispatcher" for K.L.M. Royal Dutch Airlines. (It was the airline he originally applied to for work, but accepted Air Canada's offer because it came first.)

He will be travelling to Amsterdam in the near future to renew his license with DC-

10s and 747s—and is optimistic that he may return to his former status with the airline before too long.

After two years in Milton, Naj and Gaff Mohamed say they are "very happy" to be here and that they've been graciously received by their neighbors in the community.

Involved: The children, they say, have adjusted well to public school in Milton—and even belong to a few of the community's youth organizations.

And though Mr. and Mrs. Mohamed are both employed in Toronto, they make it a point to keep up on local news and events—taking an active part, whenever possible.

Mr. Mohamed has joined a fraternal organization in town and both Mr. and Mrs. Mohamed belong to a recreational club where they are getting to know many new friends.

They appear cheerful and content—and have only positive things to say about their new environment.

For though life in a Milton townhouse development is a far cry from the lavish lifestyle they once enjoyed in their homeland, the Mohameds are thankful just to be alive—and together once again.

Bicycles, like cars, lose some of their braking efficiency in wet weather and on hills. The Ontario Safety League reminds cyclists to test your braking power on hills and after rain. You'll need more time to stop and you'll have to adjust your balance to allow for sliding. Don't be grounded by wet roads and hills. Give yourself a brake.



NAJ AND GAFF MOHAMED look through some photos from Uganda as they reminisce about the peaceful life they once enjoyed in Entebbe (before Idi Amin rose to power), their escape from the politically terrorized nation in 1972—and the long, hard road to building a new life in Canada. Behind them are pictures of their three children, Rizpa, 10, Riyaz, 12, and Rania, nine. The youngsters now attend public school in Milton.

**THE TOWN OF MILTON  
1976 MUNICIPAL AND SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS POLLING NOTICE**  
The Regular Polling Day for 1976 Municipal and School Board Election shall be:  
**MONDAY, DECEMBER 6th, 1976**  
Between the Hours of 11 a.m. and 8 p.m.  
A notice has been mailed to each Dwelling Unit in the Municipality advising the location of the Polling Place and the Advance Polling Place for the electors in the respective Dwelling Units.

**ADVANCE POLL**  
For the purpose of receiving Votes of Electors who expect to be unable to vote on December 6th, 1976.

**THERE WILL BE TWO ADVANCE POLLS SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 20th, 1976 & SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 27th, 1976**  
between the hours of 11 a.m. and 8 p.m.  
At each of the following locations for Electors of the respective Wards.

<b>WARD 1, TRAFALGAR</b>	Percy Merry Public School 263 Britannia Road East, Milton, Ontario.
<b>WARD 2, MILTON</b>	Town of Milton Municipal Offices, 251 Main Street East, Milton, Ontario.
<b>WARD 3, NASSAGAWEYA</b>	Campbellville Lions Hall, Campbellville, Ontario.

**NAMES NOT ON POLLING LIST**  
Any person who was qualified to have his name entered on the polling list during the period of enumeration (September 7th, 1976 to October 12th, 1976) and finds that his name is not entered thereon or who has not filed the necessary forms to have his name entered during the period for corrections to such list (ending November 5th, 1976) can attend at my office to secure a certificate which will allow his name to be entered at the polling station. In addition to this, qualified electors may be entitled to have their name added to the list at the polling station on polling day.  
Qualified Elector means: a person who during the period of September 7th, 1976 to October 12th, 1976 was a Canadian citizen or other British subject, a resident of Milton or a non-resident owner or tenant or a spouse thereof and has attained the age of eighteen years by December 6th, 1976.

**PROXY VOTING**  
Form are available at my office for the appointment of a voting proxy. A certificate to vote by proxy must be certified by THE CLERK. This can only be done between November 16th, 1976 and 5.00 p.m. Tuesday, November 30th, 1976.

**J. McGeachie,  
Clerk & Returning Officer,  
Town of Milton.**

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No. 2 Sweet and Sour Chicken Balls,  
Vegetable Chop Suey, Fried Rice

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Grilled Giant Pacific Oyster (6) With Bacon..... \$3.95  
Roast Red Brand Prime Rib of Beef  
English Cut 8 oz. Two Slices..... \$3.95  
King's Cut 10 oz..... \$4.95  
Goldo's Cut 14 oz. Reg. \$6.95..... \$5.95  
ABOVE DINNERS SERVED WITH BAKED POTATO, GREEN PEAS

MANAGEMENT AND STAFF WISH TO THANK ALL OUR FRIENDS AND CUSTOMERS WHO MADE OUR OPENING DAY'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE CRIPPLED CHILDREN'S SOCIETY SUCH AN OVERWHELMING SUCCESS.

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**MILTON PUBLIC LIBRARY**  
**WANTED**  
Person with snow plow and snow blower to be responsible for clearing snow from Milton Public Library carpark and pedestrian walks.  
For further information contact The Chief Librarian, Milton Public Library, 45 Bruce Street, Milton, 878-2879.