

# OUR STORY

WE OWE IT TO OUR ELDERS

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**KHOJA**  
**HERITAGE**  
**PROJECT**

# PERSONAL INFORMATION

WHAT'S YOUR FIRST AND  
LAST NAME?

Zarin Sajan

WHERE DO YOU LIVE?  
(CITY AND COUNTRY)

Toronto - Canada

WHAT WAS YOUR CHILDHOOD LIKE?

I was born in Jinja, Uganda in 1941. My dad worked for PWD, the Public Works Department. When I was just a few months old, my dad got a job in Tororo. It was over a 100 miles from Jinja. We stayed there for 6 years at which time my sister, Nasim was born. Then he got a transfer to Saroti, which was another 125 miles from Tororo. That's when my brother, Rustom and then my sister, Yasmin were born. Life was uneventful, we stayed there for about 5 years and then we moved to Entebbe, which was 21 miles from Kampala. We didn't mind moving all the time, we were very flexible, mainly because we were still young, but we really enjoyed life in Entebbe, dad's work was good, the garden was beautiful and there were lots of people about. We lived there until I was 17. Then we moved to Mbende, which was in the north, near Fort Portel, on the mountain. We were there for two years. When that move happened, we cried a lot as none of us wanted to leave Entebbe. We were all upset as we were grown up and had to leave our friends. It was especially hard for my older brother Anwar as he was in grade 12 Cambridge and there were no high schools in Mbende so he stayed behind Amina masi. I was in the Goan school which I had to leave.

## FUNNY EXPERIENCES FROM EARLY LIFE

My dad took early retirement at the age of 49. I was 19 at the time and we returned to Jinja. Then I took typing, embroidery and dress making classes. My dad still wanted me to learn shorthand but then I met Ghulam and his dad was pressuring us to set an early marriage date. We got engaged in 1960. In 1962 I got married. I did all the preparations by myself, my blouse, sari, laddoo, ganthia, by myself because I enjoyed it.

Ghulam borrowed a Mercedes for the wedding, it was the same as the one my brother, Anwar owned. It was a 220 SE. We left Jinja after the wedding and reached Kampala with a convey of 6 cars when Ghulam's family realized they left the house keys in Jinja. So they suggested we go to Wireless Hill to enjoy the view until they get back with the keys. That was no easy task as Jinja that was 50 miles going and 50 miles to coming back in a wild jungle, not a highway. It was quite a journey and was quite funny that they had to have to go all the way there and back so late at night.

My brother had gifted me money during our wedding to buy a car of my own. I decided to use this money to open my own custom dress making store called, Zarin's. I sold material and I was a qualified dressmaker. I had two seamstresses working for me. I would do the cutting and they would sew the outfits.

I was newly married and I developed crippling arthritis to the point that I was bed ridden for several months. The doctors didn't know what was wrong with me. When it was Bibi Fatima's wafaat, I really wanted to go the masjid. Ghulam and I went but when I got to the lady's entrance, I realized there was nowhere I could sit as there were no chairs inside at that time. There was only a wooden bench in the corridor. I sat there and cried and made a niyat that if Bibi Fatima gives me the strength to move my hands and feet properly then I will serve the community forever. My joints began to loosen and I began to volunteer at the mosque.

## MEMORIES OF PARENTS OR GRANDPARENTS

My grandfather had a motorcycle with a side car. My grandmother used to sit in the side car and they would drive around Jinja together. He also was an avid hunter and had even hunted a lion, each of us have a copy of the photo. Those were different times. My father also became an avid fisherman and hunter

# MIGRATION INFORMATION

## ABOUT HOW AND WHY LEFT HOME

I had my first daughter, Sabrin, on Jan 3, 1972 at Nasambia hospital. She was just seven months old when we heard Idi Amin making an announcement on the radio that he had a dream that all 'muwendi,' (the Asians) should leave the country in 90 days. India, Pakistan, Turkey and Iran refused to take a single person. America and England took many. Canada took the second most because Pierre Trudeau was in power. Then some European countries took a few families here and there such as Sweden and Switzerland. Most of the British passport holders went to England. Ghulam had a British passport which meant we could eventually go to England as well.

Initially, everyone had to leave but then Amin realized if all the professionals, the doctors, the lawyers, the accountants left, then who would do the work and how will the country function? So he decided the professional class can stay. Ghulam was an accountant and it meant we were also exempted from having to leave.

After most Asians had left, the army came to our house. There was a hotel just a few metres from our house, the Equatorial hotel. An army brigade was stationed there and they were drinking heavily that night and decided to go look for money. They knocked on our door at around 1am, completely drunk and armed with machine guns.



**They said, 'muwendi, give us all your money.' Ghulam said, 'where does money come from at night? Tell me in the daytime and I could go and get some money.'**

**Margaret was a seamstress and our live-in nanny, she was standing there carrying my daughter, Sabrin. Sabrin had been awoken by all the commotion and was crying. Margaret shouted to the soldiers in Swahilli, 'Why are you bothering them right now?' They responded by hitting her on the head with the butt of the machine gun and she fell to the ground. Sabrin fell into her lap. The soldier asked, 'how much money do you have in the house?' Ghulam said, 'I have 1500 shillings.' They took it and said we'll come back tomorrow or the day after so gather more money and we'll come back to take it.**

**The next morning, Ghulam went to an army officer who was his very good friend, he comforted him and told him, 'look Sajan, I can offer you protection and guards and soldiers all around your house, but one thing you have to realize is you have come under their radar now, so they could still harass you outside of this perimeter, it's very unsafe for you.'**

**In any case, we didn't want to stay, but Ghulam was the treasurer of the Jamaat and he was helping get the valuables out that were entrusted to the mosque. Many people left their jewellery and money behind at the mosque as these shillings would be useless for them after they leave. They said if someone needs money, use it to buy plane tickets for people who can't afford it. It's a sad irony that the Asians were forced to leave but on top of that, were required to buy their own plane tickets to get out.**

This was all part of Amin's cruelty. He said he would find such a time that it would be Diwali, Christmas and the cold of the winter so that way, the Asians would be troubled the most. Ghulam wanted to stay behind just to help. He and Roshan Bhamani called Hussein Meghjee's father, Mohamedali Meghjee in Mombasa. They told him using a code word that we have a lot of 'majani' (tea leaves) here. He understood. He said, make tea boxes and suitcases and we'll make arrangements here. So they packed all the jewellery given to the mosque into tea boxes and crates. They put the leaves on top of the jewellery. That way, all the jewellery was sent out to help other jamaat's.

## DEAR THINGS OR PEOPLE LEFT BEHIND

There was a company called Jet Freight that ships containers to England. Ghulam told me to pack what I wanted to take with me and they'll send it out. I quickly packed all the wedding gifts Ghulam had brought for me from Hong Kong and Japan along with some clothes.

We later learned that at the airport, they were ripping everyone's boxes and suitcases open and were auctioning out the contents. Gold bangles were being sold for as little as 20 shillings, that's not even \$2. Sadly, nothing of mine ever made it out of the country.

Anwar left 30 days before us, parking his Mercedes on our driveway, in fact, we were all left our cars parked in front of our homes when we fled. Anwar told me he couldn't take anything out with him. He was on his way to Jinja to try and get some of family heirlooms but he was stopped him in the infamous Mabira Forest where armed robbers threatened to hit him with a broken glass bottle, so he turned back.

Anwar asked me, 'try if you can get anything out for me, but if you can't, don't worry, we've lost so much already.' I thought about the Jinja house, all those years, all those memories and valuables. My dad had an expensive cane made of extremely rare black sesam wood with a handle made of ivory. Then there was the gramophone, records, photo albums, etc. When I said to Ghulam, let's try and get the things, he got mad, he said Mabira forest is extremely dangerous, the security is everywhere and look what happened to Anwar.

It's true what he said. Generally, it's an unpredictable drive through Mabira forest as it has all sorts of animals including cougars, leopards, and gorillas. Plus, sometimes bandits fell trees there and create roadblocks to rob people driving by.

That happened once before when we were young and were driving through Mabira forest. We had our cousin with us, Mohamed Taki. He was my father's sister's son. He was handsome and extremely muscular. As we were driving, we got stuck at a fallen tree. It was a sign that bandits could be lurking nearby. My father asked, 'Taki, what do we do?' He said, don't worry, I'll move the tree. My father said, but the looters must be hiding somewhere. Our hearts were beating so fast. Mohamed Taki told my dad not to worry and he did it, he moved the tree and we quickly got out of there.

I didn't want to leave behind all these memories of my parents and grandparents. I had a Datsun car and the only thing between me and our heirlooms was Mabira forest. When Ghulam was at work, I got in the car and asked my employee, 'will you come with me?' he agreed, he kept Sabrin in his lap in the backseat. I drove as fast as I could and quickly crossed the 50 mile to Jinja. Luckily, there was no security on the way. I got to our bungalow without any incident. It was labelled outside as always, Manek villa. There was a gate outside, but there was no one there and the gate was left wide open.



When I went inside my home, I was shocked to see there were so many people inside and the house was filthy. It was so dirty that I couldn't even take a single step inside. What I could see was they had put a stove in the living room and were cooking in the midst of all this. When I stepped inside they came to the door and shouted and said, 'what do you want?' I got scared. I didn't even get to see if our things were there and I didn't even say that this was my house. I just escaped in my Datsun and rushed back to Kampala.

## THE JOURNEY NOW

We made it to the airport in Kampala and the three of us boarded the flight, Ghulam, Sabrin and I. It was my first time on a plane. Sabrin was 11 months old and the only thing I had with me was her pacifier and her cloth diapers. We first landed in Nairobi and stayed at Ghulam's sister's house, Marzia Dattoo. The next day, she went and bought clothes for Sabrin. After a month, we travelled to Karachi to see Ghulam's eldest sister, Fatima Sajan and to commemorate Muharrum. When we left for Karachi, we asked PIA if we need to get a yellow fever vaccination for Sabrin. They said only Ghulam and I needed it so we got vaccinated but not Sabrin. When we landed in Karachi, they asked for all three of our yellow fever vaccination cards. On the pretense of Sabrin not having a vaccination card, they put her in quarantine. It was the first night of Muharrum, I stayed with her. She was wearing a thin sweater and the room we were placed in at the airport was very cold. She began to wheeze and breathe very heavily. With each breath, I could see her ribs and I was afraid I was going to lose her. There was a guard at the door and I kept pleading for help. After several days of this, and several doctors coming and going, none could understand what to do.

I asked so many of them for blankets and heaters but they did nothing. Finally, when the 7th doctor came, upon seeing Sabrin's condition, she quickly brought a single stove element and a pot of water which she began to boil to vaporize the room. She also brought a small heater. This was now the 7th of Muharrum. She also gave us medicine which I was to administer every four hours. Sabrin then began to recover. On Ashura we were allowed to leave the airport. After this, we spent some time in Karachi and then went to Saudi Arabia for Umrah. In Mecca, we had met a kind couple that offered to watch Sabrin while we performed our tawaaf. What I'd like to point out about this whole ordeal is that I had no stroller, no car seat, no toys, no disposable diapers for her, nothing of the sort, plus it was my first time travelling internationally. Sometimes we over plan things but it's important for young mothers to be flexible because at each step of the way, God will send someone to help you in some way or the other. We had nothing when we got to London. I was wearing a thin, crochet sweater. It was March and it was so cold. Ghulam had a light jacket on. Sabrin had a little sweater, which was also quite thin. We were all so cold. We hailed a taxi from the airport to my brother, Anwar's house in High Barnett but the driver had no idea where High Barnet was. He took us around in circles, and he would keep opening the a-z to check. I said to Ghulam, we keep seeing the same clock tower, Big Ben, over and over again. We were exhausted. It was almost 11:30pm or midnight. We asked him to please pull over, then he checked with another cab driver and then we were on our way. Everyone was eagerly waiting for us at the house. When we made it, my siblings were all there. The heating was on, the food was hot, it felt so good to reach our destination. In the morning, they brought so many things for Sabrin from mothercare, diapers, a crib, warm coats, sweaters, clothes and they gave Ghulam and I their own warm clothes to wear.

Because we were landed immigrants, our experiences were quite different in that we had gone to our destination on our own. For those who came as refugees, they were greeted at the airport by everyday people, church groups, etc. These were people who heard about what happened to the Asians of Uganda on the news and they would wait at the airport with warm clothes. There were even buses waiting to take them to an army base where the refugees were being housed. It was set up very well with beds, cookers, food and blankets.

People were very kind and helpful. If a neighbour came to know that a Ugandan refugee has come to live nearby, then they would drop off the gold lid milk, the best of the lot, plus cereal, clothes, and everything in a nice basket and they would leave it on the door step. England was very different then.

Ghulam had a job ready for him because he was working with Lorry profit in Uganda, a British firm, so when he landed in London, he started working within 6 days. He took the tube to work, each day and when he came home, his white shirt would turn grey from the dust and soot of the underground trains.

We enjoyed strolling on the high street. My arthritis became much better, my siblings got me a folding stroller from mothercare, it was so light, only 2.5lbs. I would take Sabrin and go to the centre to Regent St, to Piccadilly Circus, with the stroller. Plus, there was always someone around who would help me at the stairs to get in and out of the underground. Then Anwar bought a car and we'd all go out, he would drive, I would sit in the backseat with the A-Z driver so they all called me the backseat driver.

## LIFE IN THE BEGINNING

Gulam Jagani's dad, Hussein mama called Ghulam to Vancouver, no one wanted to leave London, but Ghulam was intrigued, he heard that the houses were well heated, the days were longer and brighter and it was more spacious, so Hussein mama told him to check it out at least. Ghulam liked Vancouver but the jamaat was so small. Everyone told him Toronto has a bigger jamaat so he came to see Toronto, and liked it better. He decided to immigrate here. We stayed in England for 2 years exactly. March 1973 to 1975. We really had such a great time. No one wanted to leave London. When we landed in Canada, our old friends Abba and Dillu came to pick us up from the airport and they took us to St. Catharine's. Meanwhile, Roshan Remtullah was looking for us. She tracked us down through Abba's Chacha who lived in one of the buildings in her block. Roshan invited us to stay with her. So we took the train and the 3 of us got to downtown, I'd laugh hysterically at all the names, Elephant Castle, Spadina, and finally we got to Martingrove. Her house was after a street called Red Grave. Life was very different then, unlike now, where halal groceries are available in every supermarket, we had to really hunt for it then. We experienced some overt racism as well at times. But the community stuck together and life was enjoyable as more and more khoja's kept arriving and we kept meeting friends, new and old. There was a real sense of togetherness

## WORK & HOW COMMUTE TO WORK

Ghulam sent his resume out to so many places while job searching. He tried in St. Catharines, in Hamilton and Toronto. We had been in Toronto for just over a month at that point. At one interview, they even told Ghulam if he changed his name to George, they'd hire him. He refused. Ghulam went to Roshan aunty's and told her since he couldn't find a job, we were planning to go back to London, plus Sabrin was crying so much, she missed London terribly. Ghulam said, look even my shoes are worn out from looking for a job. Roshan aunty's mom opened the Quran and said, look, the page I landed on tells me you should wait. She said, 'Ghulam, I think you should just wait 2 more weeks, if nothing works out then, then consider going.' Only 8 days passed after that and Ghulam got a letter inviting him to interview with the Ministry of Health.

Shabbir and Naushad Teja went apartment hunting for us and they found one on Don Mills, near Ghulam's office. Then we were all new so we were all trying to help each other. There was no question of calling movers or anything then, 4 or 5 guys would come and help, when we moved, Naushad, Shabbir and their friends including Raza Khimji came and helped us move.

We bought our furniture from Auni Remtulla in Owen. I still needed a table to keep the lamp on. I turned a box over and put some cloth over it and put the lamp on top, then slowly we settled down.

While we were staying at Roshan's Ghulam started to learn to drive, Jaffer Manek was also learning, so they decided to do their tests in Owen Sound because the waiting lists were shorter. They went together and then they both passed.

Right away, Ghulam bought a Malibu Classic from downtown for about \$5500. He told me to stay with him when driving it home so he'll feel braver driving. When we got to the Gardiner Expressway, he got a bit nervous, then we got home. Sabrin was with us too in my lap in the front seat.





# COMMUNITY SERVICE INFORMATION

## COMMUNITY LIFE IN THE EARLY DAYS SETTLED

Everyone worked very humbly and in unity. We found out there were majlises taking place at a bowling alley at Kennedy and Eglinton. Before that they used to take place at Salim Sachedina's house. I started volunteering, along with Naseem Esmail and Mansura Sumar. First, I helped with making tea, laying down the mats and serving fatiya. I also used to make the alaams for the Muharrum majalis.

It was winter and at the end of each night, we'd have to take everything apart and pack it into our car. Sabrin was a baby so Ghulam would turn the car on and keep it warm, while he loaded the car. Everything we did was in a very simple manner. Sukaina Habib had 2 big boxes and a station wagon, so we stapled the boxes together and draped a cloth over it to make a tabut.

The following year, Mohamed Hussein Dhalla brought us wooden sticks that connect together and plywood. As a result, we had alams that we could easily assemble and disassemble and every single day we'd make them, set them up, and then disassemble them and pack them in the car.

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Then my sister in law, Shirin Sajan discovered Honest Ed's so we used to go there bybus, we'd get off at Ossington station and I had Sabrin with me in the stroller. We were very curious and were looking for new things for the zari. One day, we saw this beautiful candle holder that could hold 8 candles in a straight line. We thought this would be perfect for Sham-e-Ghariba as we used to put candles in the mosque in those days. We lit the candle holder at the Sham-e-Ghariba program only to later realize this was no ordinary candle holder, this was a menorah! We were also looking for a musk for Hadhrat Abbas' alaam. This was to symbolize the bag he carried water in. When we found one at Honest Ed's, we were rather excited and said it would be perfect. We filled it with water and hung it on the alaam on the 8th night of Muharrum. Someone in attendance pointed out to us that far from being a water bag, this was in fact a wine bag made of leather. We were absolutely stunned. These were the type of mistakes we made in those early days while trying to practice our faith in what was then a foreign land, but we slowly learned as we went along.

Holding azadari at the bowling alley was far from ideal. In fact, it was very odd as upstairs there was a dance floor, and on some nights, while we were holding our azadari downstairs but we could hear all the music blasting from upstairs, plus they were drinking. We did a lot of fundraising, everyone from the bowling alley would help so we can buy our own centre.

## COMMUNITY LIFE IMPROVEMENT OVER THE YEARS

Then we started holding majalises at Seneca college, then Drewry Road, because it was a community centre. Then we moved the majalises to 5050 Yonge Street. That was the best, it was carpeted, well-lit, spacious, and it had comfortable chairs. Best of all, we could even leave our things there overnight. Ghulam became president while we were at 5050 Yonge and his term continued when the Bayview mosque opened. Then we met Dr. Ayoub, a Lebanese historian, and he started reciting.

Ghulam always felt women should be involved in leadership roles. In 1980, when he helped write the constitution, it was agreed that women can run in the elections. Kaniz Khimjee put her name forward and won the first election.

At the Bayview mosque's opening ceremonies, there was much excitement and there were many dignitaries invited including from the interfaith community. It was a suit and tie affair, with flowers, plants and reserved seating.

## VOLUNTEER IN OUR COMMUNITY

I served in many roles in our community including the Ghusel Khafan committee, Social committee, Maintenance committee, Marriage committee, Discipline committee, Majlis committee, Niyaaaz committee, and I helped at Out of the Cold. I also served as Chairlady. In the social committee, we did so many events. We organized international food fairs, fashion shows, dramas, etc. Community life was very vibrant and fulfilling.



THE WORLD  
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I found great pleasure from playing all of these roles as I felt good that despite my severe arthritis and with three young daughters, they were completely raised in the mosque. There was no concept of having them in bed at a certain time, they did their homework in the corner of the mosque and we were always the last ones to leave. I raised them to be very flexible and as a result, I was able to contribute so much. It's an achievement that I'm quite proud of. Don't let any disability deter you from coming forward and doing what you can.

Even at Bayview, there were no caretakers in the beginning, we had to clean up at the end, pick up all the cups, gather the garbage bags and carry them to the dump.

When there was a funeral, we'd provide mattresses to the family members staying overnight at the mosque, including blankets that Ghulam and I brought from home in case they wanted to stay overnight. Then Fida Merali donated blankets and we'd get them from the store room at the mosque and make tea for the family so that they can get through the night.

When people go through difficult times, the community really is there to help. I remember when one woman suddenly lost her husband, she was in such shock. Some of us ladies went over and helped her clean up and then sent her food for a few days. Then there was another death in the community and there were so many people going to the home. Alibhai Kaba called me over and said, 'Look at this situation. It's chaos at their home, the phone ringing non stop with out of town family, as well. He said, don't you think we should do something and that we should have our own space for funerals?'

That's when we started looking into having a ghusl room so we can hold funerals at the mosque. We found it would cost \$10k plus we had to obtain municipal approval. We overcame both those obstacles. Then the President at the time, Mohamed Alibhai suggested we should provide khari mani (a meal for the mourners). I said I'd like to do it but I don't want money for it. He said okay let's do this, 'You buy the products and we'll reimburse you for it.' We always had the key to open Bayview. We lived close, and either opened or closed the mosque so it made sense to me that I should help out with this.

When funerals happened, I'd phone Hussein Meghjee as he had his store then called Sukhi's. He'd donate the lentils and because burials happen so fast and with Ghuam at work, I decided to keep a few things on hand at home. I didn't drive but I lived about 500 metres from the mosque. So whenever there was a funeral, I loaded the ingredients into my little white buggy in the garage, and pulled it along Bayview. I'd then stop at the Longo's supermarket on the way to the mosque where I'd buy the remaining ingredients. Once at the mosque, I unloaded the groceries and cooked the khari mani at the mosque. Sometimes Zinat Nasser was there to help peel the potatoes. Otherwise, I'd do it on my own.

The kitchen at Bayview was the size of one you'd find in a small apartment. In that little kitchen, we used to make amazing things for so many people, Nargis Alibhai and I worked shoulder to shoulder for so many years and with such unity, then Kulsum Rashid started helping in addition to Zenit Nasser. Everyone started rolling up their sleeves to help. In that little kitchen, we would used to make khari mani, chai, and even khir and puri for sufro's.

Otherwise, we never had full dinners at the mosque, so we never really cooked meals in there other than that. But if there were events like arbaeen we would cook at a rented kitchen on the gas stoves. Later, we bought 9000 Bathurst. The old hospital building at 9000 Bathurst had a big industrial kitchen and we would cook there, it was so convenient. We'd go to the kitchen in the morning on Ashura to cook and then come to the mosque.

After a great deal of fundraising, we built our mosque, school, library and community centre there. I was the head of the niyaaz committee at the time that we moved to Bathurst. The construction was still not fully completed when we started holding programs there. We moved from Bayview mosque in 2010 and 15th of Shaban was upon us followed by Ramadan. There was no running water and no electric lines installed in the kitchen yet in the new building and the kitchen cabinets and appliances still hadn't been installed yet. We still had the old building on site which had been the site of the hospital that was converted into a madressah and school. We would have to go about 200 metres outside to the old building to get running water, to clean utensils, etc. We managed like that the whole of Ramadhan as there was still tea to be made and niyaaz to be served. Muharrum came upon us within a few short months. There was running water by that point but the kitchen was still not installed as there were still several permissions required from the city before this could all be done. During the night majalises, the men would light a gas stove outside and make tea for both the ladies and men. During the day majalises, I and my team of volunteers would make the tea outside on the gas stoves and then transport it across the halls to serve it. The most challenging part was when we hosted a WF conference as they had requested fresh tea be provided around the clock, which of course needed to be done outside as well.



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## ROLE AS A VOLUNTEER & HOW HELPED BUILD OUR COMMUNITY

Eid is a special time and we would do our best to make it memorable for the children. When we were at Bayview mosque, for Eid we used to go to cash and carry and buy toys for the children. We also bought them from Kausar Ladha's dollar store. Mariam Hemraj worked in the Turtles chocolate factory and would get us the pack of 3 turtles for about 20 cents. We used to put those in the children's gift bags as well. Similarly, on Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s birthday, I remember we held a big Milad un Nabi celebration. We assembled the gifts into white paper bags again and hand wrote a message on each one.

We prepared the writing on the bags at home the night before, and then so many people volunteered to help at the assembly line. When the gifts were then distributed, there was so much excitement on behalf of the kids, it wasn't all computerized, it was simple, but the kids were so happy.

We used to hold a lot of classes for the women at Bayview mosque. Every Friday, we would organize a training event, either a creative workshop to make something like Deco-patch, or cooking classes. Whoever had a talent was invited to share and to lead a class. At that time, we didn't have YouTube and Pinterest so people were very excited to come to these events and to learn from each other. It was a great way to recognize people's skills and talents. Some weekends, we'd invite the seniors to the mosque who would soak the broken turbahs in water and then they'd reshape them. Or, we would bring fishing wire and they would fix the broken tasbeeh (prayer beads).

Then we'd have dinner there together. There would be about 15 to 20 seniors, so we would cook something at home, between Nargis Alibhai and myself to appreciate the volunteers. This way, we were able to get everybody involved in some way or another.

One of my fondest memories and proudest achievements as chairlady was when we wanted to fix our zari room, there wasn't a proper room and no one was donating, so Ghulam gave me the idea to organize a walk a thon. I said I can't walk that much, he used to walk all the way to the kabrestan (graveyard).

He suggested, 'it's for the 14 masumin, why not tell everyone to walk 14 times around the mosque and through the synagogue parking lot?' The fundraiser ended up being a huge success. We raised \$14000 or \$20000 USD approximately and we ordered the zari's from Pakistan. Then my term ended so when the zari's arrived there was a new committee in place. When they did the opening ceremony of the beautiful new zari room, Taki Jeraj invited me forward and said I should cut the tape and be the first one to enter.

## ADVICE FROM EXPERIENCE ON WHAT IT TAKES TO HELP BUILD A COMMUNITY

It takes patience, thick skin, forward thinking and diplomacy. Never give up, never lose sight of the main objective, never look back. It's important to build relationships with community members, if someone is sick, go visit them, if you notice someone hasn't been seen at the mosque for some time, call them and find out how they're doing. Building a community is like planting a tree. We might not see the results in our lifetime, but the future will. We might not see the fruits now, but the future will.



## **VOLUNTEER OUTSIDE OF THE COMMUNITY - Yes**

### **KIND OF VOLUNTARY WORK DONE OUTSIDE OF THE COMMUNITY**

Outside of the community, I volunteered for the hospital by making and supplying uniforms. I helped out at many conferences that Ghulam organized. I also fundraised for the Heart and Stroke foundation by riding on their big bike and for the Canadian Cancer Society by camping out all night at their annual Relay for Life event

### **FAVOURITE EXPRESSION OR PROVERB REALLY LIKED OR KNOWN TO USE OFTEN**

It's a Gujrati expression that basically means: 'Stay with the community, marry in the community and die in the community.'

We socialize in the mosque, we meet new people, when we die, it's this community that buries us. Without the jamaat, we cannot live happily, we would become isolated. We're so lucky that we have a jamaat to help us in each and every way

### **ADVICE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS**

Be humble, be flexible, be united and never think any task is beneath you. Everyone is busy in life but it's important to take a little time out of your schedule to help the community and serve others



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## SOME PEOPLE THAT INSPIRED

**There are several women who truly inspired me. Nargis Alibhai is so hardworking and humble. We worked alongside each other for many years. Roshan Rehmtullah and Fatma bai Bharwani also inspired me. I was rather young and they would invite me to get involved by giving me small tasks and that's how I learned**

