

Narendra's Story

Narendra was interviewed for our heritage project on Ugandan Asians who moved to Britain after Idi Amin's expulsion of all Asian people from Uganda in 1972. This is an extract from their oral history.

I can remember one of the richest men in Uganda who had a very big business there - he was a refugee. Had nothing at all. And we were taken away from this particular camp and brought to another camp. (...) In the camp people were trying to give us some clothes, some food or whatever. Whoever came to give something, people were jumping for it as if they had never seen anything like that before. And to see one of these rich men, a business man behaving like that was shocking. (...) We were not really like that, we were just waiting for our turn, always disciplined we were told not to rush by our father. Just relax. What will come to you, will come to you. And obviously waited for things to happen, we had the best, always the best. Yes, people could see this that we were not rushing, so they would come and say "Look, take this".

Istvan's Story

Istvan was interviewed for our heritage project on the Hungarian Revolution, about refugees who came to Britain after the 1956 Hungarian Uprising. This is an extract from their oral history.

I went to a border town because there was supposed to be a family there where I could have stayed for a night or two before crossing by the Western border, but they left by the time I got there. Anyway, next day we were advised to take a little local train which goes along the border at one place, so close that if you jump out you roll down on the embankment you are on the other side. And we did that before we could get to that spot. The conductress - a woman conductor - the conductress came along the train and said at the next station there is an identity check with police and Russians. (...) I was with a young man who joined me and he was a student as well, and I said to these two girls opposite us (they turned out to be sisters), I said "Can you help us?". They said, "Yes, come along," so we went to the end of the train. As the train was in the bend coming up to the station we saw the lights set up at the station, you know, for checking the passengers. We jumped out because there was snow on the ground and the train wasn't fast. Then we were taken to these two girls' house where it turned out there were already five people from Budapest, refugees waiting to cross. The two girls' brother was a guide to take us through the border and he got paid for it but it wasn't a very large sum of money, but he accepted it and we didn't have any money. I didn't have anything on me of value but this young man who joined me, he had a watch and he gave that and then he led us to the border and he said, "Now, if you cross over here the other side is Austria".

Greta's Story

Greta was interviewed for our heritage project which celebrated RAMFEL, a charity based in Essex and London that works with refugees and asylum seekers. Greta had worked there for 22 years at the time of this interview. This is an extract from their oral history.

The kind of support and the conditions on which you're obliged to live are absolutely minimal. Support for an adult, well for any child or adult, is thirty-six pounds, something like thirty six pounds, two pence or something ridiculous. Thirty-six pounds a week. They don't have to pay any bills, heating and lighting but that's what they get for food - they get accommodation and thirty-six pounds a week. There are two categories of asylum support: one is called section ninety-five in which you get cash, and one is called section four in which you don't get any cash but it's loaded onto a special card every Monday. And to buy your goods, you go to a supermarket, a designated supermarket. There are certain supermarkets or large stores with which the home office have arrangements that this card should be accepted and they go to the supermarket, they take...they choose their goods, they offer their card and the amount... the cost of their goods is taken off this card. But they get no cash, so they have no money for transport: they've no money to pay for a haircut, they can't buy telephone cards with this card, but the worst thing of it all is no money for travel. No cash... and a cashless existence is very difficult. We're heading to a cashless society in general aren't we? But even now you can't pay for a bus fair with this card. We do use an oyster card don't we, but you see even then you've got to pay for the money on your oyster card. How do you do that? Either with a credit card or with cash.