# Mike’s Story—Transcript

Mike: My name is Mike Dodsworth. I'm originally from India, but I've lived in Canada for over 20 years now. And I'll talk a little bit more about that as we go along. I've worked in human resources management throughout my career, in different countries, different business sectors and so on, and I'll talk about that a little bit as well. Right now, I've officially retired, but I'm still busy doing other stuff that I'll be happy to talk about as we go along.

I'd like to share my life journey in terms of the places I've been to so far, and I've been to a number of different places, as you can see here. So this is where I was born, in Delhi, India. My dad was in the Indian Air Force, so that meant he got transferred around a lot. He had to move every three years at least. That was the system there. So over the years I've lived in many different places, and I'll show them to you one by one. So the place I moved to first was Pune, quite close to Mumbai, and lived there for a couple of years, and then moved to a place in the south of India called Wellington. And the other place where my dad was posted at the time and that's when I went to school.

So he put me in boarding school just because he didn't want to have to move me, and later my brother, around to different places when he got transferred. So I stayed in boarding school for a number of years at a place called Love Dale, which is pretty close to Wellington, and also lived there with my mother while on holidays in a place called Coonoor. So all those places are very close to each other, but primarily I spent time at school from Grade 2 to Grade 11. So yeah, I joined boarding school at the tender age of 6 and one thing good about going to boarding school that young in life is that it puts you on the fast track to self-reliance, which is an important life skill.

I remember that, the first few nights after the term started, all of us kids in the dorm were crying at night and we kept crying for the first few nights and then our parents would come to visit us every weekend and we'd bawl our lungs out when they left and all that. And that happened for a few weeks, but after that, I couldn't cry even if I tried, you just got used to it and moved on.

After that I went to this place, Sikandrabad, in the middle of India, for holidays. So my dad was posted at the time, had some nice times there. But then the big transition was my grandfather had set up a farm in this place called Kurga in the eastern state of Odisha. And so when I was in my final years at school, my dad had retired, I was just about 10 at the time. And so we used to go there for our holidays. And it was a farm, so it wasn't that my brother and I just went and relaxed and stuff, we were farmhands just like anyone else, like people who used to work on the farm. So in life that was pretty tough. We did everything you can think of from tending livestock, gathering eggs, cleaning out the chicken coop because you can imagine it gets pretty messy, replacing the sawdust flooring, gathering fruit from the orchard, digging irrigation canals, guarding the property.

There was a high school just across, and as you can imagine, the school boys were quite a menace there, they used to come to raid the farm and get the fruit off the fruit trees. So that was a big challenge. And there was no running water in the house. So there was a well about over 100 meters away. So we had to manually lift, pull up pails of water and then carry it on our shoulders into the house and fill a tub and clean, do the same process day after day. So after some years my dad installed a pump, but that was only pumping the water up from the well to the ground level, but we still had to carry it. So that's a little bit about my life on the farm.

And then I went to college in this place, Bhubaneswar, which is the capital city of Orissa and that's where I did my graduation before I started working. So this is the house in Kota where I lived and you can see it's quite a massive place and it was on a 16 acre property, which was a farm and there was a huge driveway and whatnot. So tennis courts off to one side and whatnot. So this is just to give you an idea of, and the property still stands, I looked it up recently on online and it's still there. Not surprising because it was really built solidly.

Talk about my move to Dubai, stay with Dubai for a little while. And just to give you an idea of how much the city has changed, this was Dubai one area, the main areas in Dubai when I lived there in the 1990s on the top. And at the bottom of the slide is how it looks today, the exact same area. So you can see it's just been built. Nothing more than a desert with a few buildings back like 25, 30 years ago and totally metropolitan with huge buildings and infrastructure and metro and all at this time. So yeah, that's Dubai for you and it's not stopped at that point, it's just going on and on from strength to strength.

Okay. So now about my move to Toronto and you can see moving halfway across the world in the late '90s. Why we did this was when my wife and I looked at the future, Canada seemed the best option and so we pulled up stakes and moved. A lot of folks in Dubai, what they do is the whole family doesn't move. The wife and children move, the husband stays behind and keeps working there just so that the family isn't subject to undue financial stress because when you come here to Canada, you're kind of pulling up stakes and making a fresh start and overcoming all the initial challenges that all or most immigrants go through. So that was something which many people did, was the husband to stay behind. But we decided, no, that wasn't for us. We'd move as a family, we'd swim as a family, we'd sink as a family, and we came here being totally flexible in our mindset in terms of the jobs we do. So we think that helped.

So my first job in Toronto was at a small manufacturing plant, and here again I was the first HR person in the company. The company had been around for about five years, so not that much ground to cover and it had about 200 employees and it was the place where I cut my teeth and got into the Canadian workspace and learned the ropes and how things work and how payroll works and employee relations and the legal infrastructure and employment standards and all that, which was very interesting and which I still use on daily basis.

Then I moved into the education sector, the National Ballet School, which is totally different and it was a one year contract, very interesting. It's a regular school which prepares students for the Ontario curriculum, but then everyone who joins this school has aspirations to be a ballet dancer. So that was a special curriculum, which was very interesting in terms of from an HR perspective, job descriptions and the different specializations that the teachers and the faculty had to have.

After a year I moved to international development where I stayed for the last 15 years of my career and worked in two different companies there or organizations, which was really fascinating. And I would say, looking back, that that was the most interesting phase of my entire career, which spans over 40 years. Both in terms of the cause itself, you're helping people who would otherwise not get the help that they need and also in terms of the opportunities you get to travel to different places that you normally wouldn't get the opportunity to on business or holidays. So I just wanted to pull up a few slides showing the places I've been.

So maybe if I hadn't titled the slide here, you wouldn't have guessed that it's Kabul in Afghanistan. It's a really fascinating place and I'd been there for a week and that's just one of the places I've been. Also been to Jordan and that's Petra. Now this is not the main Petra that you see in the tourist brochures, it's on the other side of the whole complex and it's an unfinished place. You can see it doesn't have that elaborate carving and whatnot, and it's a huge place where you can walk all day long and that. So been to Jordan a few times, been to all the different places, the Dead Sea, Petra, and places like that. This is another place in Jordan, it's Roman fort in a place called Jerash, which is in the north of Jordan. So overall fascinating place.

This is Uganda as you can see and that is bang on the equator. So if you stand on one side of the line, you're in the Southern Hemisphere. If you stand on the other side of the line, you are in the Northern Hemisphere. So Uganda's another place where I've been to a few times. Crossing the Nile, maybe I shouldn't have titled these slides and asked you to guess where it is. So yeah, the Nile River originates in Uganda in a place called Jinja, and then it becomes the mighty Nile that flows right through Ethiopia and then Egypt and then into the Mediterranean. So at this point it is a mile wide, so you can see how huge it is and the only place to wade across it, there are no bridges, you have to take a ferry to go from one side to the other. This is another view of Kampala from the hotel where I stayed. It's a beautiful place. Kampala actually means the city of seven hills and the city is built in seven hills and fascinating overall.

And this is just an overview of the countries I've lived in and visited so far, lived and worked in three different countries and visited, either on holiday or on business, 22 other countries. So 25 in all. In the far east, South Asia, the mainland America of course, and also Hawaii. Then in Europe there's a number of countries and of course in Africa and the Middle East and also Latin America. So that's a little bit about my job life and stuff. I've semi-retired now, but I'm helping my son-in-law with his small business and also consulting part-time in HR. So one way or the other, I'm pretty busy. I still continue to be quite busy.

Moving to Canada has been the biggest single life-changing event for me and my family. It was a fresh start in many ways, being a new immigrant, having to start again career-wise, getting to know a totally different context in a new country. We had never been here before in terms of many people come to visit on holidays and get a feel for the place and whatnot, especially in the winter. But we hadn't actually done any of that. We just pulled up stakes in Dubai and came straight here. So everything was totally new. And of course we were so pleasantly surprised, not surprised because we had heard some of it, but to experience it is totally uplifting, is how friendly and welcoming everyone is. From the immigration officials onwards and all that.

We had to navigate many cultural changes, especially how people relate to each other. And that was, for the most part, very enjoyable. My wife and I say that this was the second-best decision we ever made. And I guess you could say the best one was the decision to get married. We are both blessed to get jobs in our own fields and our children, in many ways, felt right at home right from the time we moved here. So now over 20 years on, looking back, we are really grateful to have the opportunity to move to this wonderful country.

And everywhere there are problems, but relatively speaking, Canada is great, and we wouldn't trade this for any other place in the world. As a sidebar, you could say that I'm a second generation immigrant. My father had come to Canada in the 1940s for pilot training, and he always wanted to move here permanently. And my parents did get immigration approval for Canada in the 1960s, but he couldn't sell the farm at the time, so we just couldn't move. But it's interesting for me to speculate at times what my life would've been like if I had moved here at the time.

I officially retired from my career in mid 2020, but it wasn't time to hang up my boots just yet. My son-in-law's business was ramping up and there you have me as the operations manager ready to step in and help him. So totally different industry, packaging supplies, janitorial supplies, safety supplies and things like that. And I look at this as my second career. So I'm grateful to have the chance to do something useful while helping out. And of course it is a huge change. Looking at it as a transition. Everything changes, you're doing something for over 40 years and then we stop doing that and do something else. Your self perception, your daily routine, your interaction and engagement with others, everything changes. Totally new industry. But I have become involved in areas other than HR that I hadn't touched upon earlier, like operations and bookkeeping and that. And I'm also a certified forklift operator. So if for some reason the warehouse staff is away and product needs to be moved, there I am and I'm able to do it safely and efficiently. So that's a little bit about an age related transition.

So when one is young, one does things that one looks back and, "Oh, maybe I would've done things differently or if things were different, I would've been in a different place now," stuff like that. So I think there's lots of different bits of advice I could give my younger self, and if I start with that, it would never end, right? So let me just focus on one. So getting out of one's comfort zone is one of the best ways to grow and learn. Change is constant, and we know that, and I'm okay with it. What I have a problem with this change that I think is unnecessary or rushed and I feel this is mainly due to the need to be perceived as being dynamic or ahead of the curve or competitive. At the same time I know and I'm aware that I sometimes need to get out my comfort zone and embrace change a little more quickly and decisively.

But knowing when to take the plunge and when to be cautious and tentative is a life skill I'm still working on. And I sometimes wallow in a pit of indecision when it's not required or not necessary. For example, the decision to move to Canada. My wife was an early proponent of this and kept talking about it, but I took years to come around to that. So that's just one bit of advice I'd give myself. Get moving a little quicker. Another bit of advice I'd give myself, sorry, I said I had to do one, but I just thought, let me share one more, is having more empathy for others. And that's a life skill I've developed over time. But looking back, there are instances where I feel that I could have shown more empathy in the moment.

Aging. Here I'm in a sweet spot where I think I'm aging, so as long as you're aging, getting older and not yet old still, you're still okay. So society has a complicated view of aging. On the one hand, the older demographic is respected for the things they've done, the contributions they've made to society and so on. But on the other hand, they're considered a burden. Like the very young, they have to be taken care of while not being contributing that much in return. And this is taken to extremes in certain dystopian novels and movies where the older demographic are released at a certain point in time so that they're no longer around. So this fuels numerous stereotypes which are actively promoted in the media and that we only have to think of Clint Eastwood in movies like Gran Torino or The Mule.

And if you can go far back enough, there was a 1993 movie called Grumpy Old Men. The title couldn't be any clearer, starring Walter Matthau and Jack Lemmon. And it really showed the two of them. And I think there was a series, Grumpy Old Men two and three and stuff. So it was really popular and just shows how strong that stereotype is in pop culture. And this perception is driven by many notions, including that the old have a sense that time is passing quickly. They don't have that much time left. They're conscious of declining faculties, both physical and mental. They live in the past when things were simpler and they find it difficult to navigate the complexities of the modern world.

And all of these factors can cause anxiety and impatience, which in turn can lead to grumpiness. And any or all of these could be true and stuff, but I think that the other side, is that this is the rich store of experience that the old have, is they have a realistic perspective which they can parlay into most of the current context. And many times the grumpiness is a facade which just masks insecurity and vulnerability while hiding the good heart beneath.

And I've been there myself. So I think I'd like to say just this, we live in a VUCA world and I think many of us know what this cliché stands for. It's volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. And it's true, the issues facing you, it's not just a buzzword or something, it's we face numerous issues, humankind at large does, global and complex issues. Some of them are even existential. Think of issues like climate change and increasing divide between the haves and the have-nots, heightened physical and cyber insecurity, a growing refugee crisis, loss of biodiversity. And the list goes on and on.

You are at a crucial stage in your life, at a crossroad really, when the decisions you make now, or maybe you've already made the decision, but if you haven't yet made a decision about your life path, then what you decide now will definitely impact the rest of your life going forward. So any of these issues could be your passion and vocation and you might even be thinking of making a career of it, or you might just support or be engaged in the cause in general. But these issues need to be addressed. In this context there's a temptation to save the world and take on too many problems at one time. This is impractical because you can't fight on all fronts. You have to choose your battles wisely. And that's my main bit of advice I'd give. You have to choose your battles wisely because trying to solve all problems results in being unable to solve any problem. So it's much better to focus on one or two of the problems and that would be much more helpful.