

Joan Mayo (video interview)

Q- What do you remember about Paldi?

I met Rajindi in 1948. Moved into house in 1957. Nothing organized. Remember the children and so much to do. My children had the best upbringing. New highway to Lake Cowichan wasn't built, so it was safe for kids. Halloween was always a big event, I always had a Guy Faux bonfire, it was something from my childhood.

(01:35:00) New Years Day was a big day in Paldi. Japanese families had open house , you went from house to house starting at Noon up to past midnight. There was always something happening, bridal showers, sports days, Xmas concerts. Activities at the school which everyone attended.

Q-How many people were there when you were ?

About 200 people in Paldi (in 1957) counting adults and children. It was much colder winter then, lots of snow, there was ice skating and fishing. (02:20:00)

Q-What do you remember about Mayo Singh?

Not much. The first year we were married we lived in Victoria. We'd only been married 2 years when he (Mayo Singh) passed away. (02:59:00)

Mr. Mayo was very quiet He never came to our house but we went to their house. (3:07)
I really only remember him chastising me once, because I let my older son Darcy climb on the counter. (03:14:00)

Q-Whats the story about the box of chocolates ? (03:33:00)

One day he (Rajindi) took me to his home, all the women were gathered in the living room, like they usually were with the younger children. He came in and said my mother wants to meet you so he brought me in to the kitchen and got his mother from the living room. She came into the kitchen and asked me questions about my mother , my father, do I have any brothers and sisters. Then just as we were leaving she reached into the cabinet and pulled out a box of chocolates and handed it to me, and I said Oh no I can't take that.

I was trying to give it back and she was trying to press it on my and my husband whispered to me Take it, take it you're supposed to . So outside he explained to me that because it was the first time I had visited their home she wanted to give me something.

Sweets are a custom for the Indo-Canadian community they give sweets for weddings, festivals, births of babies, they give sweets for just about anything.

(05:11:00) During the War years my father drank quite heavily, he was an alcoholic and he'd joined the Alcoholics Anonymous. We were living in the Nanaimo region and he attended an AA meeting in Duncan where he met a man who invited him to his home and kept him overnight and next morning took him on a tour of his property which runs down to Somenos Lake and my father said to this man, If I had a piece of property like this, I could beat this drinking thing. Well buy it, he says, its for sale I have to leave. So my parents bought that property, it so happened the man my father was partnered with at the Alcoholics Anonymous in the Duncan region was Mr. Bernard, who worked for the Mayos. Mr. Bernard's wife was a registered nurse and she was...Mrs. Mayo wasn't very well and Mrs. Bernard was like a private nurse for her (06:11:00) and one time when he came to visit my Dad he had my husband with him, and he was rather shy and my brother and I went out of our way to make him feel welcome, and we invited him to come back. In those days we could swim in Somenos Lake, so we invited him to come back and swim in Somenos Lake which he did.

Q-Was there any conflict because of your relationship ? (06:35:00)

There was no conflict at first, not until both sides of the family realized it was getting serious.

(06:42:00) At first as long as it was just friends it was OK. My mother wasn't happy with it, but then my mother didn't live long: she passed on before we were married.

(07:03:00) When we were first married, we ran away to get married in the States. We lived in Victoria for the first 9 months. We weren't sure how we would be accepted. But his father seemed to be alright with it, took him into the business with him. He commuted each day from Victoria and they were building some new company houses at Summit, where the Mill was at that time and we moved into one of those for 3 years and we built this house and we've lived here ever since.

(07:46:00) When we were first married yes, we lived at Summit and we were still living at Summit when his father (Mayo Singh) passed away. In 1957.

Q-What were the people like at Paldi ?

(08:12:00) That was a strange thing, I don't understand that. A lot of hippy types moved out from Ontario to British Columbia and they wanted to live in out lying regions near the coast. Actually it was fun, fun for the young people. There was always school playing fields, always something going on, soccer, softball and they joined in.

(08:48:00) There were still a lot of families here. When I first came was when the East Indian men were starting to bring their wives and families out, and the Japanese had just come back from internment. It was a vibrant community.

(09:22:00) I guess anything that happened at the school, and the school teacher relied on me a lot to help with the East Indian women and they themselves relied on me to translate for them. East Indian children were not allowed to speak their own language at school or on the school playing field. For a while when I first came here there were only 2 white women.

(10:00:00) No that was the principal herself. She thought it better for them (East Indian children) to not speak their own language at school and it was better for the Chinese, Japanese and the white children; they could all...they were all Canadian born, so she encouraged them to talk to the East Indian children only in English.

(10:19:00) They would pick up the language quicker and miraculously the children passed it on to their parents cuz in no time the mothers were ablt to converse as well.

(10:40:00) No one was isolated, no. The East Indian families, women kept to their own community. If there was a wedding or baby shower, even on New Years night when we went door to door with the Japanese there weren't many East Indians who mixed in with that.

(11:07:00) There were 2 bunkhouses with only East Indian men. I would say about 12 men, each one had his own little room. Eventually they went to India and brought back wives and children.

(11:29:00) It wasn't that they weren't allowed,(East Indian men were allowed to bring their wives and children) it was that they came out, a man would come on his own and make a bit of money first and then send for his family or go to collect his family. Some of them were single when they arrived, then they'd go back, get married and bring the wife back here.

(12:00:00) No they tried that. There's a story and a book about the Komagate Maru where a shipload of men from India tried to land in Vancouver and they were turned away. I guess the government in those days had decided they weren't going to have as many at once. (East Indian immigrants)

(12:23:00) Over the years the immigration rules have changed.

Q-What do you remember about Mrs. Yano ?

(12:36:00) Well this is a pretty big house and I was expecting my third baby when we moved in here, so my husband realized I was going to need help with the house, and he hired two women, each one part time, one was Chinese and one was Japanese, and from those two women (12:57:00) I learned a lot, not just about the cooking but all sorts of things and Mrs. Yano had six children of her own, and she was able to help me with raising mine. She gave me a lot of advice. She became a bosom friend. (13:09:00) She helped me many, many times when I (13:12:00) don't know what I would have done without her. (13:22:00) Later when my children were quite grown, in the last years of high school the Yano family moved to Duncan but we still kept in touch.

Q-And the other woman ?

A Chinese woman worked with me as well ; Mary Low, and Mary loved to cook and loved to bake and make fancy birthday cakes and my children loved them both, and when you look at it, at their homes, the Japanese family had an old fashioned bathing arrangement. Both families had (14:05:00) outhouses and yet my children loved to go stay with them.

(14:10:00) I just think they had the most wonderful upbringing.

(14:18:00) When I first came in 48 (1948) yes and they still had the little company houses, I refer to them as clapboard houses. Over the years, they gradually tore them down and replaced them, with little better housing. And the people who lived here then, the Chinese, the Japanese, they looked after their places really well but after they moved away things have changed.

(14:58:00) The houses in Paldi are rented out, they're rental units but its almost as if there s a dividing line where the old railway track was , and those of us who live on the south side don't know the people on the other side, because the people on the north side come and go so often, they move around and a family moves in and we never get to know them.

(15:33:00) She (Mrs. Yano) came in the mornings and would stay here all day, helping me with the housework or if I had to go to town, she'd look after my children and if one of my children wasn't weel, she was always there to tell me what to try.

(15:54:00) She'd been through some rough times herself, during the years that the Japanese were sent away. She was able to help me with many problems.

(15:58:00) There were times when I felt left out, times I felt I wasn't really welcome but I always felt welcome with her side. (16:12:00) She (Mrs. Yano) was very good to me. (16:21:00) I never ever did feel welcome on my husband's immediate family and un (16:30:00) If I needed a shoulder to cry on it would be Mrs. Yano.

(16:34:00) But the other East Indian families treated me so well. I can remember when I was first married, there were three women who welcomed me into the community. One was Mrs. Filman and the other was Mrs. Bawa and the other was Ama Kaur Jamat. There were those three who were close to the Mayo family.

(16:59:00) They accepted me as if I was one of them. They gave me Xmas presents and gave me gifts.

(17:12:00) Well yes...the Domans are directly related to my husband. Any festivals, any Xmas time, there were.....the two families were always intermingling and I had met Mrs. Doman before I met my husband and I (17:20:00) worked with her daughter at the Queen Alexandria Solarium for crippled children, and if we had the same day off she would take me home with her and her mother would always say to me

(17:40:00) You my daughter too, you my daughter too you come gain. She treated me very well. By that time, I had lost my mother and my husband's mother was in India at the time and she never came back.

(18:18:00) When I was first dating my husband I was in High School and I had a few snide remarks at school from the boys, never from the girls. But other than that no.

(18:59:00) There were a few white families in Paldi and they were large families. The James family, each one had seven children and the Ross's had five, so when they were gone, after they moved away, there were really only two white women left (in Paldi), one was Clarence Martin's daughter in law and one was myself.

Q-Any events or stories you can remember while living at Paldi ?

(19:23:00) We used to tease him (Clarence Martin) cuz when those women came out from India, everyone was having babies like rabbits and we used to tease Mr. Marting, ask him what he's putting in the wate, cuz he looked after the water reservoir.

(19:46:00) Mr. Martin... he would have been in 60s. We called him the Mayor of Paldi.

(20:00:00) I met Perry Ross when I embarked on writing the history of Paldi, he was a big help. One time I was asked to show a film about logging in Paldi and someone in the audience said Perry isn't that you , and that's how I met him.

(20:46:00) There was no Mill her (in Paldi) at the time: they were mostly loggers the who lived here. The East Indian men worked for the Mill in Nanaimo; first of all at the Summit (mill). The Paldi Mill closed in 1945 so there was really no industry here. They either had to go to Summit or Nanaimo to go to work.

Q-What did you do for fun at Paldi ?

(21:27:00) We're talking the days before T.V. There was an old Hall on the school field and my husband and Mr. Bernard they were both into movies. Twice a week he would rent a movie camera and rent a movie and show it in the Paldi Hall. I think they paid 15 cents to come see it. My husband's brother would bring chocolate bars and gum and things from the Paldi store spread it out on a bench at the back of the room and sell them.

Q-Any other recollections ?

(22:21:00) Yes, there were. The Japanese had their special function at New Years always and we always were invited to that, everyone was. The East Indian people had, there were so many weddings, in their community there was always something going on and then the big annual festival at the Sikh temple. But not to think the Sikh temple was just once a year ; every weekend there was something going on, and the volleyball games.

(23:00:00) The teams from the other Sikh temple would come and we'd have a volleyball tournament. I think the Paldi team was the best because it was interracial. The School Bus was referred to as the (23:09:00) United Nations school bus.

(23:26:00) As the young people graduated from High School , the Japanese children, that family would move away, when the last one graduated from High School, until there were no Japanese families left and then the East Indian people move

(23:41:00) Immigration rules changed and more and more of them came in from Indian and they had other relatives to stay with; there was no reason to come to this community first to get their feet on the ground, they'd stay with relatives first.

(24:03:00) During those early years when I first came here, the early immigrants from India would come here (Paldi) first. The husband would get a job in the Mill, the women supported one another, the children learned to speak English at the Paldi school and then moved one. Because the Mill was in Nanaimo it was easier for them to live in that area.

(24:33:00) Father (Mayo Singh) passed away in 1955 and I had never attended any East Indian funeral and that one was done in a very old fashioned way.

(24:43:00) Where they piled up a bunch of railway ties and put the coffin on top, poured gasoline on top and lit it on fire. It was quite an experience for me to see something like that.

Q-What is involved in all that ?

(25:04:00) Well it's the cremation. The Sikh religion they cremate their dead and its its...apparently in Paldi in the early days, they did all the cremations right here, and his (Mayo Singh) was maybe the last to be done here like that in the rough style with just logs.

(25:23:00) Oh no, there was one more that is, a nephew of my husbands' did not survive, he lived only for a month and they cremated him that way too.

(25:44:00) Mr. Mayo passed away, his remains were taken to the chapel, funeral chapel in Duncan, an embalmment was done that way, and he was brought to Paldi and we went into the Sikh temple. There was so many people that only the family was allowed in, then from there the casket was taken to a place in the back of Paldi, where they were already waiting for it, and they had a pile of railway ties and they set the coffin on that and the Sikh priest was there and he said the proper prayer and some more wood was piled around it; gasoline poured over it and set on fire. Mr. Martin was there, he stayed there through the night and made sure (26:39:00) that everything was consumed.

(27:00:00) But they do mourn, they do mourn they really do, but they are not hired mourners, they're family and friends

(27:12:00) The mourning period goes on for 2-3 weeks.

(35:37) What do I remember about Paldi. I remember I think I came at the best time, it was still a vibrant community, a lot of children, that's what makes a community when you've got a lot of children (35:51) Japanese had just come back those who did who cared to come back after the War ummm earlier on I understand that the ummm a lot of the East Indian men had weren't allowed to have wives and family here but when I came they were starting to bring uh whole families in and it was great.

(36:16) Well I met my husband in 1948 and he used to bring me up here just for visits, but we were married in 53. I learned a lot, I learned an awful lot in this community.