



RICHGATE PROJECT

THE GILL FAMILY:

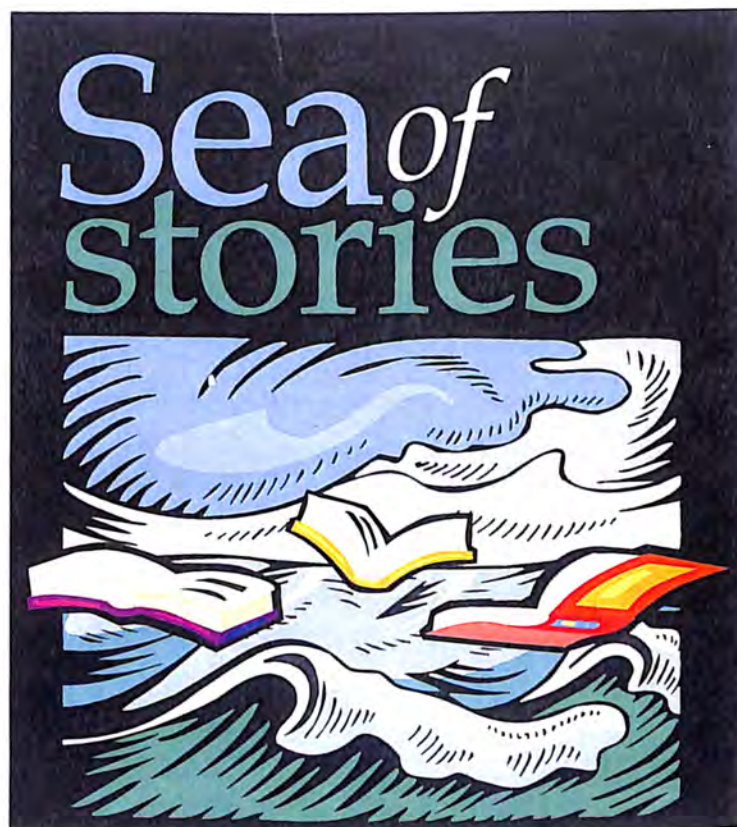
Gates form a passage, taking you from one place to another, often from the known to the unknown. Gates may provide an opportunity to move in a new direction or go back to the old. Gates swing both ways, connecting the old and the new.



MOM,
WITH LOVE,
Buttins
2008







PS "Cousin" Gill, A Wonderful Life by Charan Gill

Director/Dramaturg
Charan Gill

*Heidi Specht
*Vicky Gurjit Dhaliwal

*Appears with the permission of Canadian Actors Equity Association

Charan K. Gill

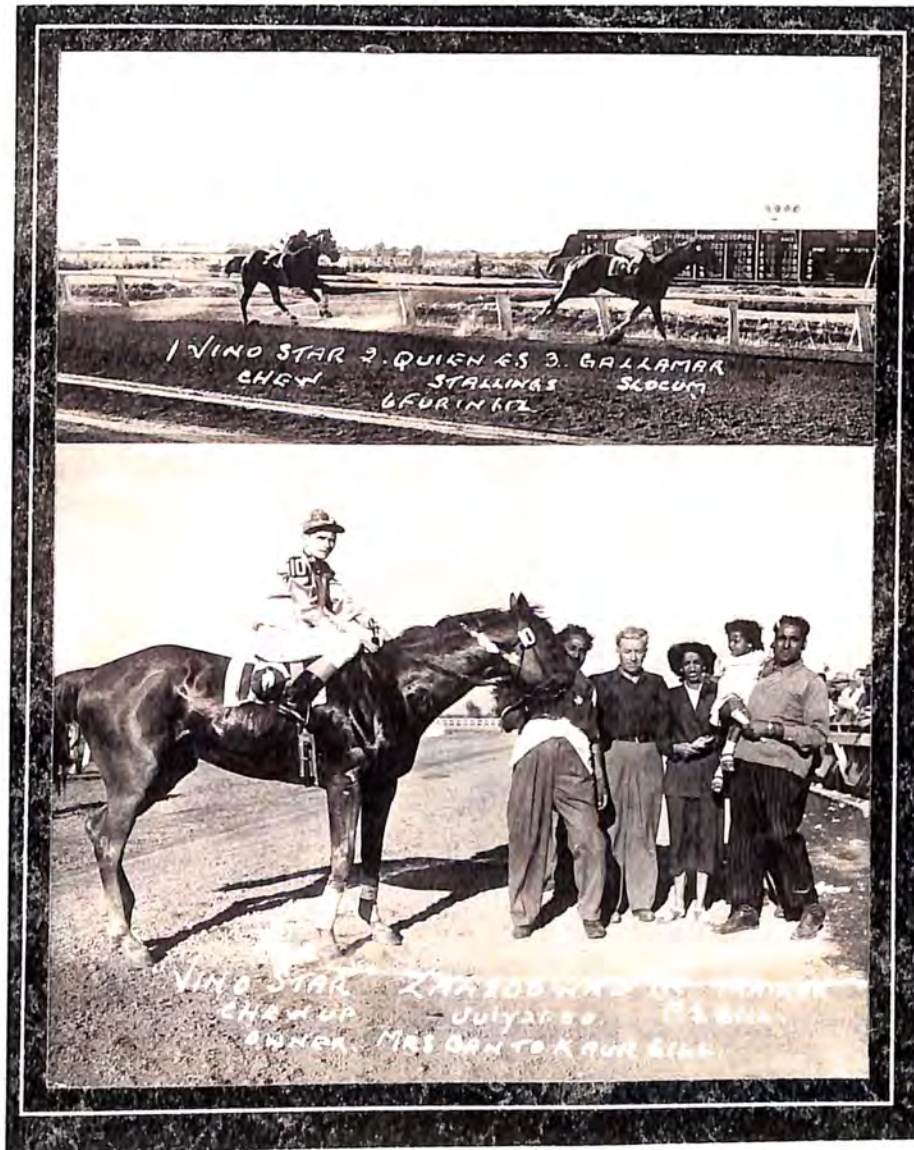
After a 34 year teaching career, I feel very honoured to be part of the "Sea of Stories" project, my first adventure as a writer, learning new skills and gaining new experiences. I have a whole new appreciation for the theatrical process. I never knew that "one word" could have such meaning, nor could that "one word" be expressed in so many ways! My play is meant to be a tribute to my Dad. When Heidi Specht (the Director) asked me what I wanted the audience to know at the end of the play, I told her I wanted them to say: "I wish I had known that man, or, I knew that man, he was my Dad too". I hope we succeeded.

Vicky Gurjit Dhaliwal

Daughter of Paul and Mohinder Dhaliwal, Mission City, BC

Vicky's interest in acting began as a child. She pursued her interest studying at Simon Fraser University and participating in Theater and Film Workshops. Vicky has worked in stage, television and film; she has performed a one-woman show, *Maharani and the Maple Leaf*, *Our Country's Good*, *Macbeth*, *Conduct Unbecoming*, a comedy, *A Flea in Her Ear* and appeared with the Vancouver Fringe Festival. She has worked on HBO productions and CBC production, *A Different Dance*. Other works include educational videos and in film, *Return to Earth* which premiered at the Montreal Film Festival and in Europe.

PS "Cousin" Gill, a Wonderful Life
by Charan Gill



Three years have passed since the death of Buttons' father. It is the evening of the anniversary and she is sitting on a chair in her living room, reading and drinking a glass of wine, working on moving forward with her life. Her heart is heavy. She goes to her father's trunk and takes out his photo album. She sits back in her chair and tries to summon the courage to open up the first page but cannot bring herself to do it.

Buttons:

Dad, it's hard to sit here and open up your album since you died. Each year on the anniversary of your death, I try, but I can't seem to make it past the first page. I'm mad that you died, for leaving us so quickly. You always said you would never be an old man in a hospital, hooked up to machines, that you were going to die in the

barn, and we were not to cry, because "when your time is up, your time is up". You bugger, you did it the way you said you would, except you weren't in the barn, you were in bed. That night, our usual 7:30pm phone call "hi Dad, how are you doing, how are the horses, anybody drop by today", never anything earth shattering, just touching bases... amazing how I can forget that you're gone and I automatically go to call you at 7:30. How dare you die, how dare you leave us? You took care of us right up to the end, you didn't make us go through horrible times watching you not able to take care of yourself. You went the way you lived, you did things your way, just like you had always done. You made sure we would remember you as a strong, independent man.

She opens the album and sees the passport. She picks it up and reads it out loud to herself.

Passport Number 443, Phangan Singh, son of Narajan Singh
National Status: British Subject by Birth
Issued: January 20th, 1930
Date of Birth: April 6th, 1912

How many times did I clean the farm house, and I never saw your passport or army papers. And then the night you died, I found them sitting on top of your dresser. Did you know that you were going to die?

She opens up the passport. An image of the passport picture she is looking at appears on the screen upstage centre.



Your picture: I've never seen you in a turban!! You look so young.

I wish I had asked you more questions, like: how did you feel when you left India? Were you scared? Did you have a choice, or was the decision made for you? Did you ever regret coming to Canada? No, you were so adamant about being Canadian! No hyphenated Canadian for you, it was important to belong and to be part of the community.

Why didn't you ever go back to India? Your poor Mom waited every year for you to come back. I went to India, I saw a picture of you that I had never seen before, you must have been in your late 20's. The picture was high up on a wall in a room reserved for "important visitors"; it was like a shrine.... Everyone in the village

even those born long after you left India, spoke about you as if they had met you!
How amazing!!

Remember the time I interviewed you for one of my UBC assignments, I wish I could find that tape; I need to hear your voice again...

I want to hear you say all those crazy, politically incorrect expressions like: "shoot the bugger", "hit 'em where it hurts", "stand up for yourself", "what are you going to do, lie down and die!" And how you always said to me, "take care of your brother, Hardave, and your sister, Vicky".

I'll never forget you telling me about leaving your village, Nathuwalla, with your brother, traveling to Calcutta, then to Singapore, where he said good bye to you and told you: "Never lie, never cheat, and always protect your good name". Those were the words you lived by!!

She dives in and open up the first page of the album. When she opens it, the projected picture changes to a photo of her father in a field hockey uniform on the steps of the Second Avenue Gurdwara.



Dad, when I look at this picture of you, standing on the steps of the Second Avenue Gurdwara in your field hockey uniform, I think: what position did you play, who did you play against, was your team successful? So many questions that I never thought to ask when I had the chance. I just always took it for granted that there was lots of time.

Did you know that the man standing beside you would one day be your father-in-law, that you would marry his daughter?

This picture must have been taken after you left Ocean Falls. You were only 18 when you left, but as the treasurer of the temple you brought the Sikh Holy Scriptures and the funds from there and gave them to the Vancouver Second Avenue Gurdwara.

I remember all the Sunday mornings you dragged us to the Gurdwara; you'd be sitting in the car, with the motor running, while we were still inside getting ready. You never said anything, but the message was "hurry up; we're going to be late"!!

Gaining courage, she opens up another page of the album. The projected picture changes to a photo of her father in his army uniform.

Look at you, in your army uniform. Your shoulders back and chest out on the steps of the Legislature Building in Victoria, lobbying for the right to vote. One of only a few East Indians in the Canadian Army. I remember you telling me East Indians weren't wanted in the Canadian forces; you were supposed to join the British Army instead. But you were determined to serve your country. How did you manage that? Who did you have to meet and stand up to to be allowed to join the Army? So many questions that I never asked!! I know how proud you were to be a Canadian soldier. I'm so proud to be your daughter.

She opens up another page of the album. The projected picture changes to a photo of a close family friend, Thaka Singh.



Oh, I remember Thaka Singh, looking so old, but strong, leading the horses around the barn area. I remember you and Mom telling me that he was the first East Indian to own and train horses; he was your introduction to racing.

She opens up another page of the album. The projected picture changes to a photo of "Vino Star", one of her father's horses at the track with family (see page 32). Now she is relaxed and fully enjoying herself.

Your first winner, "Vino Star". Dad, you look so huge, and I'm so little. Mom so young and stylish in her suit. Mom's family, the whole neighbourhood, and friends were always there to watch the horses run. Sometimes you won a lot of races, some years you didn't. You never showed expression when the horses ran, never found blame if they didn't win, you just said oh well, maybe next time. It's

a good thing we have the winner circle pictures, without them, we wouldn't have a family album.

She opens up another page of the album. The projected picture changes to a photo of "My Crafty Run", another one of her father's horses.

"My Crafty Run", the last of your babies to race. That day, you actually stood beside me during the race, not going off by yourself like you usually did. You shouted and asked if I thought Crafty was going to hang on for the win. I remember thinking if there is a god, please let my Dad win today. (*Sound cue of horse race*) And we did.

She opens up another page of the album. The projected picture changes to a photo of her childhood home on Lansdowne Road, Richmond.

Wow, how Richmond has changed! Life on Lansdowne Road was simpler. No one locked their doors; we played outside, roaming from yard to yard, catching frogs, falling into the ditch, and roller skating without any concerns.

We grew up as part of a "League of Nations". None of us thought of ourselves as hyphenated Canadians, we were just the "Gills", the "Fishers", the "Matsuzakis", the "Van Loons", the "Clarkes", the "Cliffs".....we all lived on Lansdowne Road, across from the Racetrack. Where our house once stood is now the Bread Garden. Dad, I know you didn't like the changes; you never wanted to go near the Mall.

She opens up another page of the album, the final picture. The projected picture changes to a photo of her father in his later years.

Dad, looking at this picture of you is so hard. I look at your hands and your eyes and it's as if you are here.

You talked about having a hawk when you were a kid in India. We've seen a hawk many times since you died. When Mom and I went to India, and I finally got to meet Sadara Singh, your nephew who grew up with you. A hawk flew down and sat on the courtyard across from us. I said to Mom: "Dad came to make sure we got here okay, he finally came back to India!!"

And when Hardave went to Mexico, just after you died, he looked out the window as the plane was taxiing down the runway in Vancouver, and saw a hawk. And when he landed, he saw a hawk. Were you telling us it was okay, that it was time to move on, that you are still part of us?

Dad, I always thought I needed to have a marker for you because the Sikh faith requires cremation, and a scattering of the ashes on open water, so there are no headstones or gravesites to visit. But now I know I don't need a marker, you left your mark on all of us, we continue your memory.

The album is closed and the image disappears from the screen. Buttons acknowledges that she has made it through the album. She starts to put it back inside the trunk, but changes her mind and decides to leave it out, in a place of honour on the coffee table instead. She is feeling elevated, her heart sings.

You really lived the words to your favourite song, "What a Wonderful World".

As the lights begin to fade on stage, the song "What a Wonderful World" plays, and another image is projected on the screen. The picture is of Buttons as a child on a horse with her father standing next to it. The music plays and the image lingers for a moment before fading out, with the music.

The End