

May 19 2008 (10:00am)

Bachan Kaur Alamwala and Jasmer Kaur Alamwala

Interviewer- what is your full name?

Bachan Kaur- Bachan Kaur Alamwala

Jasmer Kaur- it's Gurbachan Kaur

Bachan Kaur- no, it's Bachan. That's what is written from the beginning.

Interviewer- and yours?

Jasmer Kaur- Jasmer Kaur Alamwala

Interviewer- what year did you come for the first time?

Bachan Kaur- in '60

Interviewer- and you?

Jasmer Kaur- '59

Interviewer- what's your village in India?

Bachan Kaur- Alamwala

Interviewer- what was it before marriage?

Bachan Kaur- Chupkithi, near Moga

Interviewer- and yours?

Jasmer Kaur- before marriage?

Interviewer- yes

Jasmer Kaur- Nathuwala

Interviewer- what year did you get married?

Bachan Kaur- I got married in '48

Interviewer- and yours?

Jasmer Kaur- '57

Interviewer- who was the first to come from your family?

Bachan Kaur- my husband was the first one

Interviewer- what year did he come?

Bachan Kaur- he came in '49

Interviewer- he was born here right?

Bachan Kaur- yes

Interviewer- did your husband come first too?

Jasmer Kaur- yes

Interviewer- did they come together?

Bachan Kaur- no he came two years after. Mine came in '49 and he must have come in '51

Interviewer- Daljit came two years after?

Bachan Kaur- yes, in '51. It should say on the passport

Jasmer Kaur- when was Shindo born?

Bachan Kaur- she was about a month old when he came here. She was born in '49.

Interviewer- when you came, did anyone else come with you?

Bachan Kaur- two of my kids came with me. My daughter Surinder and son Jasvir

Interviewer- how old were they both?

Bachan Kaur- Jasvir was 6 years old, there were a couple of days to his birthday then, his birthday is November 19

Jasmer Kaur- is it 19th?

Bachan Kaur- no its 20th

Interviewer- Surinder Kaur and Jasvir Singh?

Bachan Kaur- yes

Interviewer- Jasvir was 6 years old and Surinder?

Bachan Kaur- Surinder was 11 years old.

Interviewer- and you? Did you come alone?

Jasmer Kaur- my son came with me

Interviewer- what's his name?

Jasmer Kaur- Harminder

Interviewer- how old was he?

Jasmer Kaur- he was 8 months old

Interviewer- when you first came where did you live?

Bachan Kaur- we lived...

Jasmer Kaur- Lake Cowichan

Interviewer- did you live together?

Jasmer Kaur- yes

Interviewer- did you live with someone else also or just you both and your husbands?

Jasmer Kaur- just us

Interviewer- what did your husbands do?

Bachan Kaur- worked in the mill

Interviewer- both?

Bachan Kaur- yes both. There was a mill in Honeymoon Bay

Jasmer Kaur- in one mill

Interviewer- how much did they get paid?

Bachan Kaur- it was about \$400 a month so \$8 an hour.

Jasmer Kaur- I think it was less than that

Interviewer- when you first came to Canada, what was your impression?

Bachan Kaur- it was great

Interviewer- did it seem different because of the white community here?

Bachan Kaur- there were Indians all around us here. There were 3 or 4 houses of Indians.

Jasmer Kaur- there were white people around too

Interviewer- but around you there were Indians?

Bachan Kaur- mostly Indians

Interviewer- how many non-Indians lived around you?

Bachan Kaur- well they didn't live with us. There were others around us.

Jasmer Kaur- there were quite a few

Bachan Kaur- there were the Sahal's house and the Braich's house and the...what were they?

Jasmer Kaur- the Khela's

Bachan Kaur- yes and the Toosey's house

Jasmer Kaur- they were all near by

Bachan Kaur- and nearby also was...there were quite a few houses nearby. They worked in mills

Interviewer- did everyone work in mills?

Bachan Kaur- there were only mills. There were two mills and the strong men worked there. They shut down when we came here. We came in '68.

Interviewer- towards Abbotsford?

Bachan Kaur- yes, it was Abbotsford

Interviewer- why did you leave and come this way?

Bachan Kaur- we came this way to live in farms

Jasmer Kaur- we came to work in farms

Bachan Kaur- we bought a 10 acre farm then, and the kids all went to school.

Interviewer- did you work after coming here?

Bachan Kaur- yes it was an Irani farm. There was a nursery here, a cannery. The one nearby here.

Interviewer- so you worked after coming to Abbotsford?

Bachan Kaur- yes

Interviewer- did you work in Lake Cowichan?

Bachan Kaur- no

Jasmer Kaur- there was no work available there

Interviewer- did you work in a cannery too?

Jasmer Kaur- no I didn't work, only in our own farm

Bachan Kaur- I only worked there for two years before working at our own farm too

Interviewer- we wore suits here but if we went out then we wore dresses

Jasmer Kaur- in Lake Cowichan we wore dresses because there were white people there

Bachan Kaur- yes

Jasmer Kaur- we starting wearing suits after coming here

Bachan Kaur- then we starting wearing pants. We only wore dresses for a little while

Interviewer- when you went to the gurudwara, what did you wear?

Bachan Kaur- we wore suits

Jasmer Kaur- we were wearing suits when we came from India

Interviewer- did you go to the gurudwara often?

Bachan Kaur- only when there was a function because it was far away

Interviewer- did you have a car?

Bachan Kaur- we didn't know how to drive there, we learned once we came here.

Jasmer Kaur- our men didn't even have cars then!

Interviewer- they didn't?

Bachan Kaur- no they did.

Jasmer Kaur- they bought them after

Bachan Kaur- when they went to work they had them.

Jasmer Kaur- they bought them later.

Bachan Kaur- well we had one then.

Interviewer- did you buy it once coming to abbotsford?

Bachan Kaur- no, it was bought there.

Interviewer- in Lake Cowichan?

Bachan Kaur- yes, we had it there. We had a different one then.

Jasmer Kaur- we shared one.

Bachan Kaur- when they worked in the evenings, both brother shared the car, which ever one needed it would use it.

Interviewer- were all of your children born when you were in Lake Cowichan?

Bachan Kaur- no, two were born in India, two were born in Duncan. We lived in Lake Cowichan but they were born in Duncan.

Jasmer Kaur- the hospital was in Duncan.

Interviewer- what are their names?

Bachan Kaur- whose?

Interviewer- the two born in Duncan

Bachan Kaur- Avtar and Jagtar Alamwala.

Interviewer- and yours? (talking to J)

Jasmer Kaur- mine were also born in Duncan.

Interviewer- how many children do you have?

Jasmer Kaur- two sons, oldest is Sukhwinder and the other is Kulvir. Younger than Kulvir is my daughter Kulwant and then Baljit. These four were born in India and the oldest son was in India.

Interviewer- when did you first return to India? After how many years?

Bachan Kaur- I went after 15 years.

Jasmer Kaur- 15-15.5 years later.

Bachan Kaur- came in 60 and went back in 75.

Jasmer Kaur- we went in '74

Interviewer- did you all go together?

Jasmer Kaur- yes, I went also. After coming in '59, I went then with you.

Bachan Kaur- we went together, she came first though.

Interviewer- did you just go to visit?

Bachan Kaur- yes and to get my son, **Jasvir** married.

Interviewer- all your children went with you?

Bachan Kaur- no just one went, the one who we had to get married. The rest stayed here.

Jasmer Kaur- my daughter went with me, Kulwant.

Bachan Kaur- Jagtar went with me also, the younger one.

Interviewer- how long did you go for?

Bachan Kaur- we went for 4 months.

Jasmer Kaur- we went around September/October and came back in January/February

Interviewer- when you moved to abbotsford, where did you get your groceries from?

Bachan Kaur- we used to go to Funk's store. And the one store, where there are banks made now, what was it called?

Jasmer Kaur- there used to be Super Value or Funk's store or Co-op.

Bachan Kaur- these were in Abbotsford. In clearbrook, we used to go to another store, it's now been torn down and other stores are there.

Jasmer Kaur- what was the name?

Bachan Kaur- you already said it was Funk's store.

Interviewer- how often did you go grocery shopping?

Jasmer Kaur- whenever something was out, we would go get it.

Bachan Kaur- it was close by so we used to go all the time and put the kids in a buggy to take with us. We would just put it on our tab and they would drop it off at our house.

Jasmer Kaur- in abbotsford, we would,

Bachan Kaur- if we found somebody with a car, we would go with them.

Interviewer- Funk's store was made since 1958 and now it's closed.

Bachan Kaur- the other one, what was it called, where we used to get 3 yards for \$1?

Jasmer Kaur- it was near?

Bachan Kaur- it was where that bank that burned down was, Toronto Dominion.

Jasmer Kaur- it was in the Super Value shopping center.

Bachan Kaur- there were other stores there too, such as a drug store and clothing store.

Jasmer Kaur- I don't remember the name of the store.

Bachan Kaur- we would get cloth to make covers for our blankets.

Interviewer- the stores were white owned?

Bachan Kaur- yes, they were white owned, east Indians didn't own much.

Interviewer- then how did you communicate and put it on the tab?

Bachan Kaur- how much ever they asked, we gave it.

Jasmer Kaur- we would put our items on the counter and then pay.

Bachan Kaur- when we bought groceries, we would put it on the tab and our husbands would go pay on payday.

Interviewer- When you lived in Lake Cowichan, where did you get groceries from?

Bachan Kaur- there was a co-op store there, that's the place I was just telling you about.

Interviewer- how much did your groceries cost a month?

Bachan Kaur- \$100-150 for a month. We would get about \$15 worth at a time or go to overwaitea, where bread was 3-4 for \$1.

Bachan Kaur- there were a lot of stores.

Jasmer Kaur- butter was sold for a few cents a pound then too, now it's expensive.

Interviewer- when you came to Abbotsford, did the stuff get more expensive?

Bachan Kaur- yes, but not by a lot. The wages were also low then. We worked in a cannery for \$1 an hour. If they paid someone \$1.50 an hour, they told them not to tell the others because others didn't get it.

Interviewer- in a cannery or nursery?

Bachan Kaur- a cannery. It was near by, and owned by a white man, **Matt** that was his last name, but everyone called him that. His son's name was Alec and I don't remember the other one's name. There were two brothers. Their house was in Clearbrook, on the higher part. Then the wages were very low.

Jasmer Kaur- it was \$1 a flat for berry picking also.

Bachan Kaur- no, it wasn't even that. When we worked in Aldergrove...

Jasmer Kaur- shortly after coming here...

Bachan Kaur- they were strict. If you picked every single berry through out, then they paid 75 cents, otherwise less if you leave some berries, then about 60 cents.

Jasmer Kaur- they wouldn't weigh the flat either like now, they would only take the flat if it was filled to the top.

Interviewer- do you remember the name of the farm?

Bachan Kaur- I can't remember. Something like "kooner" farms, his name was something like that.

Interviewer- when you worked in the cannery, what did your husbands do?

Bachan Kaur- they worked in the mills. They worked in Squamish.

Interviewer- so they lived there and you here?

Bachan Kaur- we lived at home and they would return on weekends after working there. They would come home on Fridays and leave on Mondays.

Interviewer- were their wages more or less there?

Bachan Kaur- it was the same wage that mill workers got. We didn't work with them.

Interviewer- when they returned, did they only stay the weekend?

Bachan Kaur- only two days, Saturday and Sunday was their day off. When others came from India, they got them jobs there too. They didn't have cars so they got them jobs with them also telling them that. They did the same thing when they worked in Langley they said they didn't have a car so they could all work together.

Interviewer- how long did they work in Squamish?

Bachan Kaur- only a little while, four or five years. By the time we grew our farm, that day he hurt his foot at the mill. Then he stopped working there and starting working at home.

Interviewer- and your husband?

Jasmer Kaur- he only worked for one year in Squamish.

Bachan Kaur- then he worked elsewhere and then Langley.

Interviewer- when you came, were there any other family members here?

Jasmer Kaur- yes, my brother was here.

Interviewer- he lived in Lake Cowichan also?

Jasmer Kaur- he lived in Duncan.

Bachan Kaur- Bikar has been here for a long time.

Interviewer- his family lived with him?

Jasmer Kaur- yes

Interviewer- did your family live here before also?

Bachan Kaur- my family...I sponsored them after. There was a law available where one could sponsor his/her brother or sister.

Interviewer- when did you sponsor them?

Bachan Kaur- I sponsored them after being here six years. My brother was a teacher there and he was able to apply himself due to being educated. I thought that if there is a law that lets someone sponsor her siblings, then why not. But, they told him that he has to apply for work first and once received, then would be allowed to come. He did get a job in Edmonton but I had applied for him also and my letter came first. He got his certificate here after too so he was able to teach here. They told him the students had to be able to understand him though and the students said they couldn't. That is why he went to Edmonton after doing a six month course.

Interviewer- when you first came here, it was on a plane right?

Bachan Kaur- yes

Interviewer- did customs say anything to you?

Bachan Kaur- they did check all my stuff. They did whenever someone came and went.

Interviewer- they didn't trouble you?

Bachan Kaur- no

Interviewer- and you?

Jasmer Kaur- no

Interviewer- did your husbands come to pick you up from the airport?

Bachan Kaur and Jasmer Kaur – yes

Interviewer- how long did the sponsorship usually take?

Bachan Kaur- the letters would come out quickly. I had sent my letter with her dad. We applied here and hand delivered the letter. we dropped the letter off in Moga and then paid them. They told us they would keep the letter then send for us, but they never did.

There was a boy who used to come to Moga for school and they gave the letter to him to deliver. When we went to the police station with my uncle, they told us that we were supposed to get the papers from there in the mail but they didn't. They just hand delivered them and kept the money we gave them for postage, so we were told to re-send them. Before we left, I told my uncle to show the papers to another officer who was sitting on the side and then he said that the papers were still the same so he would sign the papers and mail it himself. Our work got done right there.

Interviewer- I saw your pictures over there, but do you have any others of your wedding or any other event?

Bachan Kaur- nobody took pictures at weddings then.

Jasmer Kaur- nobody did.

Bachan Kaur- there aren't even any from Shindo's wedding. They were made on the computer later.

Jasmer Kaur- there was no movie either.

Bachan Kaur- nobody took any pictures then. Back then they would invite everyone over...

Jasmer Kaur- and hide the bride before bringing her out...

Bachan Kaur- it would be still dark out and they would cover the bride with a big sheet and sit her to get married. And they were married. They didn't even do the lamas before.

Jasmer Kaur- they would cover their faces and get married. Which bride is willing to do that now?

Bachan Kaur- that's how we got married.

Interviewer- your husband went back to India at a young age?

Bachan Kaur- yes

Interviewer- how old was he when he went back?

Bachan Kaur- he was about 5 years old and the younger one was 3 years old.

Interviewer- why did they go back?

Bachan Kaur- our mother-in-law got asthma. Doctor told her she couldn't stay here.

Interviewer- she used to live here?

Bachan Kaur- yes, she was here. At the time, they used to work with sawdust too.

Interviewer- then all the children went back to India?

Bachan Kaur- yes, there were only two kids. They came back after 17 years.

Interviewer- did your mother in law come back too?

Bachan Kaur- no, she didn't. they used to say that they will bring her here because she used to say before that they should stay together and not leave their house empty.

Part 2

Interviewer- who did you sponsor first? My brother.

Bachan Kaur- first, Mehr Singh.

Interviewer- the one about who you were talking about earlier?

Bachan Kaur- yes, he was six years younger than me. Then I sponsored my nephews.

Interviewer- what year did Mehr Singh come?

Bachan Kaur- I can't remember now, but I applied for the sponsorship six years after coming myself.

Interviewer- so in '66?

Bachan Kaur- no later than that. The letter was late. Probably in '67. His family came after that.

Interviewer- he sponsored them himself?

Bachan Kaur- yes. First his son then daughter. Then I sponsored my nephew.

Interviewer- what's his name?

Bachan Kaur- Baldev Singh Brar and Surjit Kaur Romana. I applied for both but Baldev passed in his interview. She was educated upto grade 10 and he was in the first or second. During the interview they took him out. I then sponsored Bachan Singh Sran.

Interviewer- so Baldev Singh Brar and Surjit Kaur Romana.

Bachan Kaur- I am their masi (mom's sister). She was a Brar before marriage. They came with my brother when he came as a visitor. Then I sponsored my niece (brother's daughter). My older brother's children are in Toronto now. She then sponsored her family once coming here.

Interviewer- what's your nieces name?

Bachan Kaur- Sawarn

Jasmer Kaur- Sran

Bachan Kaur- the last name was Sran when she came.