

RATTAN KAUR ATHWAL

Interviewer- first can you please tell me your full name?

Rattan- Rattan Kaur Athwal

Interviewer- when did you come to Canada?

Rattan- 1952

Interviewer- who did you come to?

Rattan- my husband

Interviewer- what was his name?

Rattan- Hardial Singh

Interviewer- and when did he come here?

Rattan- he was born here

Interviewer- what is his birth date?

Rattan- 1912

Interviewer- do you remember the month and date?

Rattan- August 28th

Interviewer- he was Canada's first born Indian?

Rattan- yes

Interviewer- who did he have here?

Rattan- his father had come before, his mom with him. His dad came first then got his family here

Interviewer- do you know when his father had come?

Rattan- no I don't know about his father, he was probably here since the '06 or '07. I don't know the date. I don't know dates that well, because I'm old now and you know how it is when you get older. He must have come around then.

Interviewer- and what was his name?

Rattan- Balwant Singh

Interviewer- and then, in 1912 Hardial Singh's mom was probably here too?

Rattan- yes mom was here

Interviewer- do you know what year she came?

Rattan- I don't remember these things, there were some things that they used to tell us before, because I got married after. You know when you hear things as kids.

Interviewer- do you know what her name was?

Rattan- Kartar Kaur

Interviewer- do you know where your husband was born?

Rattan- in Vancouver

Harninder- well at the church there, where there was the West Presbyterian Minister, I mean the West Pres church there.

Interviewer- on 1st Street?

Harninder- yes that is where the church was built, from near on there.

Interviewer- do you guys have a copy of the birth certificate?

Harninder- our dad's?

Interviewer- yes

Harninder- no I don't think so, the birth certificate

Rattan- in the purse maybe

Harninder- it might be in her purse

Interviewer- really, you have it?

Rattan- I can check

Interviewer- when Hardial Singh Athwal, was born in Vancouver, was the family settled in Vancouver?

Rattan- yes, my father-in-law was the granthi at the gurudwara, he was the first granthi of the gurudwara.

Interviewer- of what gurudwara?

Rattan- the big gurudwara, there used to be another gurudwara there first in town

Harninder- it was the one on west one, 1st avenue

Interviewer- then, when you came were they still living in Vancouver?

Rattan- no they, my father-in-law used to work for the Ghadr .

Interviewer- what work?

Rattan- Ghadr work.

Harninder- he was a freedom fighter

Rattan- they people to have freedom to come and go.

Harninder- he gave his life for other people to come to Canada

Interviewer- do you know what kind then, was he an activist then or what was it that he did?

Harninder- he got his own people free from India to come, to have freedom to come back and forth to Vancouver, anywhere they want to come. He's a modern Mormon I guess.

Rattan- first he came then after he sponsored his wife and family. He had two daughters and my husband, who wasn't born yet.

Interviewer- so your husband already had two sisters?

Rattan- yes two sisters

Interviewer- what were their names?

Rattan- one's name was Udham Kaur and Naranjan Kaur

Interviewer- when your mother in law came, these two sisters came with them?

Rattan- yes they were very young

Interviewer- do you know what year their birth's are?

Rattan- I don't know.

G3- they both passed away

Rattan- before my wedding. I didn't even see my father in law, and only saw my mother in law a little while. Father in law was hanged.

Interviewer- your

Rattan- was hanged

Interviewer- here?

Harninder- no Lahore

Rattan- there was a trial for a long time

Interviewer- what was that surrounding?

Guest 2- what?

Harninder- dad was in jail

Rattan- from here they went together. When his family came they kept them locked up and didn't let them come here

Interviewer- when they came to Canada?

Rattan- when they were supposed to enter Canada, two families came and they didn't let them enter.

Harninder- you know that ship Komagatamaru? He was on that ship.

Interviewer- your grandfather?

Harninder- so the whole history started from there kind of. And then they brought him here and then went to court. Tried to hang him but then they sent him back to home, they turned the whole ship back to India, so they hung him in India, for a freedom fighter.

Rattan- look in my purse for the birth certificate

g3- who's?

Davinder- I don't have that, we have been changing things around. Maybe you could, do you read Punjabi?

Interviewer- no

Davinder- neither do I. Remember we gave it to someone, and he never returned it

Rattan- yea that man that was going to write a book

Davinder- yea. Don't you have one at home?

Rattan- they take and don't return it

Interviewer- the ones who take it?

Harninder- we had whole books, people give them to them and they come back

Rattan- we keep forgetting things

Harninder- they never returned the book, like a write wrote us. He wrote down all this book and he gets so many copies, and when people got the copy from us, nobody returned them back.

Like all the information they copied it in the book

Rattan- there were a couple of pictures, he said he wanted to write a book, with everybody.

Then I forgot.

Harninder- three or four guys came and they kept telling them that they were going to write the book. But they never came, they might have wrote it but they never came. No proof at all. All the pictures we had, they took them and they never returned the pictures to us. And now we got no memory kind of. Whatever we had we had the book, the first who wrote the book, that copied one book of that.

Interviewer- do you know what the book was called?

Harninder- it was Sikh something. Great Sikhs of Canada? First Canadians or something. It was written by Giani Kesar Singh.

Interviewer- Giani Kesar Singh

Harninder- yes

Rattan- no

Harninder- no the blue book was written by him, in English.

Rattan- there was another book in English that we had.

Harninder- the blue book was in English. I don't if he still in Vancouver or he might have moved to Calgary now.

Interviewer- maybe, he could be tracked down.

Harninder- yea it could be, all the universities has, he said they put, publish to the university, UBC, Simon Fraser, that was what he said anyways.

Interviewer- then it could be found, I'm pretty sure I can find it.

Rattan- the family that he sponsored, my father-in-law, two families came together. They wouldn't let either get down.

Interviewer- from the ship?

Rattan- yes. They weren't letting families come

Interviewer- so my question is, your grandfather was already here and then he went...

Harninder- on the ship yes

Interviewer- then he back and came back on the Komagatamaru. But then he was turned back
Harninder- yes then they were turned back, the whole ship was turned back.

Interviewer- and...

Harninder- they never let nobody come, like no, they couldn't bring wives

Interviewer- but your father was already here at that point?

Harninder- my father was born here right, so he was first Canadian so they had to give him all the rights right.

Interviewer- so when you father, or grandfather returned to India, before the Komagatamaru incident, did your father go back, did the whole family go back to India?

Harninder- yes

Interviewer- the whole family, so your father went to India. And on the ship it was just your grandfather

Harninder- yea but dad came over here

Interviewer- and he was turned back, and when they got back, he was hung.

S- he was arrested, in jail prison.

Interviewer- and then, when did Hardial Singh come back here?

Rattan- first, I don't know the first time. Then he went back in 1932, then after staying a year, he came back. Then he went again in '36, that's when I got married. He went to get married.

Interviewer- what year is that?

G3- 1936

Harninder- like they kept on coming and going back and forth.

Interviewer- in between that time

Rattan- then his two sisters passed away. I used to say to return after a year to see them. When mom used to call she would say to come back and visit. Then he got married. Then after getting married he came by himself.

Interviewer- so in 1936, he came permanently?

Rattan- well because he was born here he was allowed.

Interviewer- yes

Rattan- so he did

Interviewer- and then when did you get married?

Rattan- in 1936

Interviewer- what was the date?

Rattan- well it June month, I don't remember, in the Punjabi calender, it was June 15, we didn't know the English calender.

Interviewer- so you got married on June 15th?

Rattan- yes

Interviewer- so he came back after his wedding?

Rattan- yes after his wedding. But he had stayed there for about three years. Then he came back. Then I stayed a little bit there.

Interviewer- in India?

Harninder- she said he stayed there for three years after wedding then came back.

Interviewer- so he got married, and came here for three years and then went back?

Rattan- then he sponsored me

Interviewer- when did he sponsor you?

Rattan- in 1952

Interviewer- but he was already here?

Rattan- yes.

Interviewer- then he was on the Island here or still in Vancouver?

Rattan- no he was on the Island.

Interviewer- do you know what year he came to the island?

Rattan- island, in '51.

Interviewer- when you came, what work did he do?

Rattan- mill worker

Interviewer- do you know what mill?

Rattan- Mayo's mill, Mayo Lumber. From where you came from yesterday, we used to live in Paldi.

Interviewer- you?

Rattan- I stayed there a little bit when I came too. First he used to work there and there were a lot of single men that lived there, there were cookhouses made, they used to live there. Then when families came, we bought a house there

Interviewer- in Paldi?

Rattan- yes

Interviewer- how long did you stay in Paldi for?

Rattan- we stayed there for 6.5 years

Interviewer- 6 years?

Rattan- I think so. See how long it has been for us being here, about 49. We have moved here since 1960.

Interviewer- in this house?

Rattan- yes.

Interviewer- and when you used to live in Paldi, it was the mill's house right?

Rattan- yes the mill's

Interviewer- so you used to give them rent?

Rattan- yes, the rent was low, they barely took it and we barely gave it

Interviewer- do you remember how much the rent used to be?

Rattan- about \$20

Interviewer- and when you first came to Paldi, who lived in your house?

Rattan- the house was empty

Interviewer- it was only the two of you?

Rattan- who was going to live in the house. Used to live in the cookhouse and then Mayo got the house emptied by whoever was living there. The houses were theirs, they used to empty them when families came

Interviewer- who was in your family, just the two of you or someone else too?

Rattan- no my sons, my sons are born in India. 3 boys.

Interviewer- they are all born in India?

Rattan- born in India.

Interviewer- and what are the names of your sons?

Rattan- eldest, Mahinder Singh

Interviewer- and what is his date of birth?

Rattan- 1940, born in India

Interviewer- and after Mahinder Singh?

Rattan- that son has passed away but his name was Harjinder Singh. He was the middle one, and got in an accident.

Interviewer- and his date of birth?

Rattan- April, when was Jinder's birthday?

Harninder- April 7th, he was 9 years younger than Moe so '49.

Davinder- it's too bad because Kesar Singh passed away, he would know everything about, I don't think there's book.

Rattan- sometimes we old people forget things.

Interviewer- need help sometimes

Rattan- sometimes it just happens

Interviewer- then after Harjinder Singh?

Rattan- he is born after

Harninder- myself

Interviewer- and what's his name?

Rattan- Harninder

Interviewer- and what's your birthdate?

Harninder- March 11 '51

Rattan- I remember some things but forget others.

Interviewer- so when you came here, your eldest son was 12 years old, then did you put them in school?

Rattan- yes we put them in school. They were educated

Interviewer- where did you put them in school?

Rattan- after Paldi, there a small town on the lake, small there used to be a bus that went there.

Interviewer- do you remember the name of the town?

Rattan- Lake Cowichan.

Harninder- mostly the school was in Paldi, all the elementary kids went there.

Interviewer- so they went by bus?

Rattan- bus would pick up all the kids, there were many Indian kids then. Everybody worked in that mill.

Interviewer- when you came? You must have came on plane?

Rattan- yes

Interviewer- then you first came to Vancouver?

Rattan- Vancouver

Interviewer- do you remember what you brought with you when you came?

Rattan- mostly clothes. We didn't know what to bring. We didn't bring anything for the house

Interviewer- and, when you first came here, when you got off at the airport, how did it look?

Rattan- it looked different. It seemed different for a while.

Interviewer- it took some time to adjust?

Rattan- yes it takes time. Now there's a lot of people, in those days people were sparse. Few Indians.

Harninder- not like there were mix of people, Japanese, White, Chinese

Interviewer- when you guys came to Paldi?

Harninder- yes in Paldi, all different kind of race, like people of Japanese and Chinese

Rattan- it was different for a while, then we got mixed with the people. There was a gurudwara there, Paldi gurudwara, everybody talked so that made a difference.

Interviewer- what month did you come, do you remember?

Rattan- July

Interviewer- do you remember the date?

Rattan- 12th of July

Interviewer- who came to the airport to get you?

Rattan- my husband came

Interviewer- he came alone?

Rattan- yes

Interviewer- then you came straight to the island by a ferry?

Rattan- I went from Vancouver to victoria on a small plane. I came here.

Interviewer- first you went to Vancouver

Rattan- yes I got off at Vancouver. The fare was put down as to so I could come to Victoria.

They got me from Victoria

Interviewer- so you came in the ferry, or by a boat at that time

Rattan- no plane

Interviewer- you came on one plane to Vancouver, then from there on another plane to Victoria.

Do you remember how much your fare was at that time?

Rattan- they paid from here, I don't know because I didn't do it myself.

Interviewer- when you first came, you probably brought some suits right?

Rattan- yes

Interviewer- then you wore the suits here?

Rattan- no, the ones that lived here, didn't wear any suits. Then after coming here, I bought some dresses and clothes here. When we went to the gurudwara we wore suits but the rest of the time to town we didn't

Interviewer- did it seems different to you at first?

Rattan- yes it felt different to wear a dress. It felt really weird to sometimes wear dresses to the gurudwara and then cover up our legs with a sheet. I used to wear a suit when I first came but the ladies that were there from before, they didn't like me wearing suits. Then I started wearing dresses

Interviewer- then the dresses you wore, you made them yourself or bought them from the store?

Rattan- the dresses were ready made

Interviewer- from the store?

Rattan- yes, we used get cheap clothes then.

Interviewer- do you remember at that time how much one dresses cost?

Rattan- sometimes \$10 each, sometimes \$5-7. Some were cheap and some expensive. The ones to dryclean were expensive at \$20 each and the ones to wash at home for \$7 or \$10. The wages were low so the clothes were cheap. The wages used to \$1-2 per hour.

Davinder- I want to look for his birth certificate

Manj- yes that would be

Davinder- you can give me your address and I could mail it to you, I have it I don't know where I put it, well I could send it to you guys

Interviewer- when you came, did you work outside anywhere?

Rattan- no I didn't work

Interviewer- then how long did you stay in Paldi?

Rattan- about 7 years

Interviewer- then you came to this house right

Rattan- this house

Interviewer- when you came to this house, your husband was working in the mill?

Rattan- yes mill

Interviewer- still the Mayo Lumber mill

Rattan- yes for Mayo

Interviewer- do you know roughly how much his wages were when you came?

Rattan- it was either \$1.25 or \$1

Davinder- I think it was \$1.5 an hour

Rattan- it was around that much, the pay was very low

Interviewer- where did you used to get your groceries from?

Rattan- from a store in Duncan. If you wanted anything Indian, there was a store in Vancouver and if somebody was going that way, we would ask them to bring us the item.

Interviewer- so you would fill an order together

Rattan- yes

Interviewer- when you used to go the grocery store, milk, butter, or whatever you needed, do you remember how much the grocery bill would be?

Rattan- sometime more sometimes less

Interviewer- but roughly how much?

Rattan- easily \$40-50. We had 3 children to feed and needed something for them too

Interviewer- you had kids here too?

Rattan- the daughters are born here

Interviewer- how many kids did you have here?

Rattan- three daughters

Interviewer- what are their names?

Rattan- the eldest is named Rajinder Athwal

Interviewer- and her date of birth?

Rattan- April 29 53. And tell about yourself next, you know

Interviewer- are you next?

Davinder- yes I'm next. My name is, actually my name's Davinder.

Interviewer- and your date of birth?

Davinder- August 1954, on the 20th

Interviewer- and then after?

Davinder- Kuljeet

Interviewer- and her date of birth?

Rattan- 1962

Harninder- June 9th

Interviewer- so your daughter, their births were in Duncan hospital?

Davinder- Duncan

Interviewer- when did your husband retire?

Rattan- 1986

Interviewer- and he worked in the same mill til then? For Mayo?

Rattan- first when he came he worked at other places, but since I came, he worked at Mayo's

Interviewer- but you didn't work?

Rattan- no

Interviewer- and did your sons work at the mill to

s- no the eldest one is a mechanic, heavy duty mechanic. The second was still learning when he passed away. This one is in a mill

Harninder- I'm the sawmill worker

Interviewer- and your daughter went to school here?

Rattan- yes they are educated here since they were born here

Interviewer- and what do they do now?

Rattan- the eldest is a nurse but now she teaches at nursing school. She lives in Surrey.

Davinder- I'm a community helper too. And the young one works for the federal government.

Interviewer- your husband just recently passed away?

Harninder- it's been 10 years

Davinder- 12

Rattan- 1996

Interviewer- when you came here, the families that were here, they were all mill workers?

Rattan- all the Indians were mill workers. When we stayed in Paldi, here there weren't that many of us, but in Paldi, all the Indian houses were near one another. We all loved one another. Even the white people that were they were really nice too, they never said anything to us, or fought with us or my kids. The time we stayed there, it was nice.

Interviewer- you guys growing up on the island, in this community, did you have the same sentiment that it was a fairly integrated community?

Davinder- oh yea even when they went to go to, like they used to get the groceries at the Eaton's, the grocery store Eaton's. they used to be very polite to them and help with the groceries for them. They didn't have any money, they used to charge it, and then they could come back and pay when they can. It's not like if they didn't have any money, they couldn't get any groceries. But they, that's what they did. They were very polite to them.

Interviewer- and this grocery store, was it owned by Caucasians then

Davinder- no it was Eaton's. I don't think you remember Eaton's

Interviewer- like Eaton's department store?

Davinder- it was a big department store and they used to have a grocery store in there and they used to go there and pay. They all used to integrate with them

Interviewer- and you guys had, didn't run into any problems through school?

Davinder- no

Interviewer- and since you have come, has anyone else from your family come as well?

Rattan- yes my brothers and sisters. My two brothers are here as well

Interviewer- did your husband sponsor them?

Rattan- no when I came here, I applied for them, there was a law for brothers and sisters

Interviewer- and what are their names?

Rattan- older is Bhajan Singh Sangha and the younger one is Charan Singh Sangha

Interviewer- and when they first came did they stay with you

Rattan- yes to me for a little while but then they couldn't get work here. So my younger brother, Charan Singh, went to work at a mill that was on the lake and started living there. There was a cookhouse to stay in for all the single men. The older one, came and stayed with me a little while, for about 2-4 months. Then he left to work in a mill near my sister

Interviewer- did anyone else come?

Rattan- my sisters but they came after getting married. The sister younger than me, the boy went from here. They got my sister married there. The other one she got married to her brother in law. The third one was sponsored here by the second sister. I only sponsored two brothers

Interviewer- what was your husband's village in India?

Rattan- Village Karodhpur, District Jalandhar

Interviewer- and do you still have your family home there?

Rattan- no, no one

Interviewer- and what was your village before marriage?

Rattan- my village was Langaree Sangha, District Hoshiarpur

Interviewer- is there anything else that you would like to tell that I haven't asked yet.

Rattan- you know what to ask.

Interviewer- is there anything you guys would like to add?

Davinder- the ladies always used to wear dresses. They never used to wear suits, and that's when she came. They always had dresses on and nylons

Interviewer- so you guys also wore western clothes

Davinder- yes

Interviewer- except for when you went to the temple or even the temple?

Davinder- no we went to the temple with western clothes on too. When did we start wearing suits to church?

Rattan- first we wore dresses, the first few days I came, I wore suits but then dresses.

Davinder- everywhere you went you wore dresses and they even went town

Rattan- I wore dresses in this house too. I wore bathing suits

Harninder- and they were all dressed up not like now, like how people go in ordinary clothes. They used to wear 3 piece suits.

Interviewer- the men

Harninder- and the ladies would get all decked out.

Interviewer- your father, could he speak and write English, was he quite versed?

Harninder- he could speak English and write a little bit. How much you need to get around. He got around, with his English.

Davinder- like even when they went into town, the people in town knew exactly what they were saying. Like if they were to go get groceries and they were looking for something, the people in the grocery stores knew exactly what they wanted.

Harninder- they would just point to things, and say 'come with me' and they go and get the stuff

Davinder- they didn't have any barriers like we have now. The white people were really nice to them and everything.

Interviewer- what about cars, did your father have a car?

Davinder- yes

Interviewer- when you came, did he have a car?

Rattan- he bought one after I came

Interviewer- what year did he buy one? First one?

Harninder- he had a '52 Chevy

Davinder- it was a black little car

Rattan- got one in '30

Davinder- no hatchback

Harninder- it was like a little European car

Davinder- black little car

Harninder- it was like a Volkswagon, it was like an English car, something like that

Interviewer- a '52 or '53

Davinder- like a taxi, you know how you have a taxi in England, it had leather seats in it, dad used to drive it with a shift. Enough room for all of us to get into the car. And before then, we used to go on the bus, the bus used to run from Paldi to Duncan, back and forth and we all used to go on the bus, everybody.

Interviewer- and did you guys have any pets growing up?

Davinder- we had dogs and we had a little farm

Interviewer- I was noticing because there's a lot of property here.

Davinder- we used to have a little farm

Harninder- we had horses, not horses cows

Davinder- chickens and pigs

Harninder- you know like a small farm, where you grow your own stuff and garden. Did your stuff growing and killing chickens here and there

Davinder- butter, we know all how to

Harninder- cream then butter on the top

Davinder- skim it all

Interviewer- so what was it like growing up in this area?

Davinder- it was fun growing up, you got to love the community, we did a lot of work. Our dad made us work

Harninder- and around this area, it's so quite right. You could just go sit quietly and let your mind wander. You don't know how long you've been sitting outside. You have to build it up right but now we don't have that so kind of letting it go. Like we moved to our own places and come here every week kind of, kind of maintain it all the time. With the bush, we try as much as we can but every it keeps growing. You cut it then next time, it's twice as much. In the same spot.

Interviewer- I'm just noticing some of the pictures around here, especially that one, who is in that picture?

Harninder- oh that is our grandfather.