

David Singh Aulak

David Singh Aulak's father, Giana Singh Aulak, first left his home land of India in 1905 to travel to California in 1905 in a Japanese freighter. It took Giana Singh a month and a half traveling from Calcutta to the United States. He hailed from the village of Aulak, district Jalandhar, Punjab. From California, Giana Singh made his way to Vancouver. Giana described this area as the "Jewel of the Earth" and thus decided to settle here. At the time, he was a bachelor working 14 to 16 hours every day in the sawmills earning 3 to 4 cents an hour. Giana Singh and others like him worked day and night, cutting down trees and dragging them with horses to the mill. They built the houses and roads that exist to this day.

Giana Singh returned to India for his marriage to Tante Kaur and in 1929 they had a son, George Gurmail Singh Aulak in 1930. George Gurmail Singh was a year and a half when his father Giana Singh and his mother arrived to Canada in 1931. Gurdev (David) Singh Aulak was born on March 9, 1935 in the Kitsilano area of Vancouver. David's siblings were born subsequently: Sadhu Singh (1936), Gallie Kaur (1939), Shindo Kaur (1940), Mindo Kaur (1941), Jarnail Singh (1942), and Javinder Singh (1957). The Aulak family lived on 4th avenue near the 2nd avenue gurdwara, which was the first gurdwara built in Canada. David Singh's father and other pioneers founded this gurdwara and built it one board at a time.

While growing up, the Gurdwara was a very important part of life. Giana Singh would take his children to the Gurdwara every Sunday. David Singh recalls that as children, they were young and used to play around and had many good times there. According to David Singh, the Gurdwara played a very important role in keeping the community strong and tied together. At the time in the 1940's, there were approximately fifteen families in Vancouver. David Singh remembers when all the Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs went to one Gurdwara. Even though there were different beliefs and no mosques or mandirs, the Gurdwara was a focal point for the Indian community to stay knit together. The Indians were not allowed to buy houses near the Caucasians so they stuck together. Since many people, including his father, were not well educated and could not write letters to India, educated Indians would provide this service for a fee. To write one letter, they would charge 25 cents. Since there was no other alternative, his father would pay this fee while earning only 40 cents per hour. This example shows some of the many hardships the first pioneers had to go through.

Although there were hardships, Giana Singh was doing well. He had three to four trucks, a business, and two to three houses. At the time, there was a ration and he would go once a week to get a pound of butter that would last them a week. Sugar was also a rationed item at the time. David Singh points out that they were always well fed and had plenty to eat, even during the Great Depression in the 1930's when managing a family of eight children from a \$150 budget was difficult. David Singh's father had started a garden growing his own vegetables, raising chickens and a couple of cows. His father believed in feeding and caring for his family well and getting them all educated.

A remarkable story that David Singh remembers his father telling him was when the Komagata Maru came to Vancouver. He says that at the time, the Canadian authorities were trying to starve the Sikhs that came aboard the ship and kept them docked for a month and a half. It was while they were starving, Giana Singh and a few other families would go at night and send up *rotis* and water to them. Instead of letting the passengers starve, they grew stronger which shocked the authorities.

While growing up in Vancouver, David describes how everyone used to have specific chores. For example, he would sprinkle the chicken feed, his sister would gather the eggs, and others used to milk the cows. Everyone had to take part in doing the housework such as cutting wood for starting fires to cook meals. For fun the children would come up with creative games to play. They would gather chestnuts from trees or the sidewalks, drill holes through them, attach them with a string and have a chestnut party. They would also visit gas stations in those days and play music in the jukeboxes. In those days when trams ran across Vancouver, the kids would take rides on those and sometimes save money to watch shows at the theatres on Granville Street.

David Singh describes that he never experienced or noticed discrimination up until grade 11. It was when his teacher told him he was different from everyone else and questioned whether he was bullied by others. These questions and remarks opened David Singh's eyes and from that point on he started noticing that there was a difference. After high school, he was the first Indian to apply and pass the tests for the Vancouver Police Force. However, the Superintendent rejected him stating that "[they did not] want any Hindus in the police force."

David Singh graduated from John Oliver Secondary School and went on to study Engineering Applied Science at the University of British Columbia. He was in his second year when he moved to India for three years to build his family home.

It was while David Singh was in India that he found out about his eldest brother's death. He was given the newspaper, *The Vancouver Sun*, where it was the front page news. His brother, Captain George Gurmail Singh Aulak was in the Royal Canadian Air Force. During the accident, he was flying a plane as a skipper to pick up pilots in a flight that had recently come down. On his way back to land at the airport, the weather was very bad and the plane's landing gear became caught on a tower at the end of the runway. The plane flipped over onto the highway and all the people aboard perished on the spot. David Singh recalls that his brother received a 21 royal gun salute and to this day, his name is in the Parliament Building's in Ottawa as 'Flying Officer George Gurmail Singh Aulak.'

After living in India, David Singh's father instructed his relatives to find his son a wife. It was on June 4, 1956 David Singh married Kirpal Kaur. David and Kirpal went on to have three sons: Grembille (1956) who passed away due to a heart attack, Robby (1960), and Mike (1972).

Later on, David Singh moved to Prince George and was one of the founders of the Gurdwara there in 1970. At the time there were approximately 100-200 Punjabi families there.

Although the first generation faced many troubles and did a lot of hard work, David Singh would like to stress the importance of remembering our past. In present day, David Singh lives in Surrey with his family and carries on the history and legacy of his father Giana Singh Aulak.