

Amrao Singh Bains

Amrao Singh Bains came to Canada in 1959 from Village Mahilpur in Punjab. He left behind his father, mother, two brothers, one sister, wife and four children. Before him, his father Basant Singh had attempted to come to Canada in 1906 but was only able to make it to Hong Kong. Due to some kind of eye allergy, he could not pass the medical exam. Therefore, Amrao's grandfather, Briam Singh decided to go to Canada. Briam Singh came to Canada in 1907 and landed in Victoria where he later sponsored his son Mangal Singh in 1923.

Mangal travelled alone from Punjab, India, because back then families did not come to Canada. Mangal Singh came to the port of Victoria on a Ship as there were no planes then; and lived in the city of Victoria. After a couple of years, Mangal Singh Bains sponsored his sons, Pyara Singh and Surjit Singh. When the law changed to include nephews, Mangal Singh Bains sponsored his two nephews: Amrao Singh Bains and Bakshish Bains in the year 1959.

Upon his arrival in Canada, Amrao Singh took a glance around and said to himself, "how will I ever make a living in this new country?" He had to face many difficulties for instance, he was told to cut his hair in order to work at a certain place and sometimes he was also told to learn English. Eventually, Amrao had to cut his hair. The first time he went to the Sikh temple, he thought that no one would let him enter because his hair was cut; however he was surprised to see that many people in the temple did not even have their heads covered.

Amrao Singh's younger brother, Bakshish Singh, came to Canada a month after Amrao Singh due to the need for more workers. In Vancouver, a man by the name of Ranjit Mattu owned a mill where he would hire new immigrants for a dollar and older immigrants for \$1.88. Amrao Singh and Bakshish Singh and worked at this mill in Vancouver for a year and half. Due to the shortage of work at Ranjit Mattu's mill, many workers began travelling towards Quesnel and William's Lake for work. With the shortage of work

in the Valley, Amrao Singh left to Viewpoint where he worked as a **planar** in the Netherland Company for five years. The Netherlands Company was part of a union when Amrao Singh Bains joined and his starting pay was around \$2. Altogether, there were around five to seven other immigrants living in Viewpoint who also worked at the Netherland Company. The small mills in the surrounding jungles were all sold and once again, there was a shortage of work. For \$5 a month, Amrao Singh Bains left for Quesnel to work.

Amrao Singh soon filled out a sponsorship application for his wife and children. After this, Amrao Singh thought long and hard about where to settle once his family arrived. He realized that there were only three families in Williams Lake and four to five families in Quesnel. Life was so different here in Canada, especially up north. Amrao Singh made the decision to travel back down to the Valley. Upon arriving in Vancouver, he applied for a job at the Swanney Lumber Company where he filled box cars. Amrao Singh Worked for 19 years at the Lumber Company for a wage of \$2.50 which slowly increased to \$3. Amrao Singh always wondered how immigrants were ever able to save money to send back home because the pay was so low. In seven years, Amrao Singh Bains saved up some money to sponsor his family and buy a new home.

In 1966, Amrao Singh's wife Pritam Kaur and his four children: Balbir Singh Bains 29-10-53, Kulbir Kaur 22-12-55, Dilbag Singh Bains 22-12-57, and Paramjit 24-7-59(he was three months old when Amrao left them to come to Canada), came to Canada for the first time. Amrao Singh's wife, Pritam Kaur, described Canada as very different from India upon arrival to the foreign land. Amrao Singh, Pritam Kaur and their four children lived together in a new house that Amrao Singh bought before his family came to Canada. The cost of the house was \$13,500 in 1966 and consisted of two rooms upstairs and two downstairs. The house remains standing to this day. Back then, the houses had wooden fireplaces that required chopped wood to fuel fire. Amrao Singh and Pritam Kaur remember

using a plate on the top of the stove to make food. They would use the plate and put a pot of water on the top of the plate to make rotis and daal. They also had a metal pot outside their house which caught sawdust automatically, and this would be used to heat the house during the cold.

Amrao Singh recalls the younger immigrant workers telling the white officials that their elders were back home and that they had to send money back home periodically. The young men were told to receive a receipt so they could claim it in their income taxes. Some hardships that Amrao Singh and his family faced were when many people, especially white children would throw eggs at them when they walked down the street. They would also face racist remarks just because they dressed differently.

In those days ladies would wear dresses, long shorts, pants and also Indian suits. Many white Canadians would criticize the Indians on their attire saying that they are wearing their sleeping clothes. Slowly over time, many ladies started wearing the traditional salwar kameez.

Life was very different for Pritam Kaur; after leaving her native country, life seemed tough with four young children. Her days were filled with household chores and taking care of the kids. One thing she remembers was her husband not allowing her to work even when she was offered to work outside. To this day, Pritam Kaur has not learned any English and says there was never any need. Living in a tight knit community lessened the need to learn the English language.

The first time Amrao Singh returned to India was in 1986 with his wife and youngest son, Ranjit Bains, who was born in Canada. Currently Amrao Singh Bains and Pritam Kaur live in Vancouver and are surrounded by their five children: Balbir Singh, Dilbag Singh, Paramjit Singh, Ranjit Singh, and Kulbir Kaur.

Gurmit Singh Bains (Brother of Amrao S. Bains)

Born on October 12, 1935 in Mahilpur, District Hoshiarpur, Gurmit Singh Bains left his home for a new land since most of his family had left for Canada. He arrived in Canada in 1969 and left his wife, Sukhminder Kaur and children Manjit and Karamjit back in India. From 1959 to 2000, Gurmit Singh Bains worked at the same Terminal Sawmill. His starting pay was \$2.10 and when he retired, his pay was \$22.50. As soon as Gurmit Singh Bains came to Canada, he lived with his older brother Amrao Singh Bains in Vancouver.

In 1972, Gurmit Singh Bains sponsored his wife and two children to Vancouver. Once his wife and children came to Vancouver, Gurmit Singh's children spent their days going to school, while his wife stayed at home to take care of their youngest son, Jasvir. Once the children were older, Gurmit Singh's wife Sukhminder Kaur began working at a vegetable cannery. She worked 24-25 years at the cannery where her starting pay was around \$5 and then \$12-\$13 when she retired. After working at the cannery for many years, Sukhminder Kaur officially retired when the cannery shut down. Gurmit did not face a lot of hardships to settle in Canada since many people from his family and village were already here for guidance and help. He said that he left one home i.e. India to come to another home i.e. Canada.