

Sohan Singh Deo

Sohan Singh Deo was born on April 25, 1939 in the village of Kharaudi, District Hoshiarpur, Punjab. Sohan Singh's grandfather, Asa Singh Deo, was the first member of their family to arrive in Canada in 1906. Almost half a century after his grandfather, Sohan Singh came to Canada in 1963 with his wife, Naseeb Kaur Deo and their daughter of six months, Amarjit Kaur. Naseeb Kaur was originally born in Canada, but had been raised in India since she was six months old. Naseeb's father had taken his family to live in India and returned by himself to Canada to earn a living. It was not uncommon at that time to have family settled in India while the men financially supported their families from Canada. Support for young mothers and children was easily available in India since Canada was mostly a bachelor society.

However, by 1963 most of Sohan Singh's in-laws were well established in Vancouver so when he arrived with his family, they all lived together. He first started working at a saw mill full time earning around \$7-\$8 an hour. After a couple years at the sawmill, he went on to work in the plywood industry. Sohan Singh explains that during that time in 1966, the plywood industry had the highest pay of approximately \$14-\$15 for starting pay. After working in this industry for 20 years, he then moved onto working for the Scott Paper Company for another 20 years.

After a few years of work and becoming settled in Canada, Sohan Singh sponsored his brother, Surjit Singh Deo, to come to Canada. Surjit Singh travelled alone to Canada at the age of 14-15 years old. During those times, there was a quota system for immigration that allowed relatives to sponsor blood related family members so after applying, Surjit Singh was able to come within a year or so. Later, Sohan Singh went on to sponsor his other two brothers, Paramjit and Parminder as visitors in the 1970's.

The family went on to slowly grow as they settled in Vancouver. Naseeb Kaur had three more children: Rajinder Kaur born in 1964, Davinder Singh born in 1966 and Balbir Kaur born in 1969. Raising a family of four children kept Naseeb Kaur very occupied so there was no need for her to work until later on.

Sohan Singh has always been an active community member. He became very involved when he founded the Khalsa Sporting Club, a semi- pro soccer club in 1964 that established a means of uniting the Indian community and influenced the social and cultural decisions of the community. He also became the secretary of the East Indian Canadian Welfare Society in 1970. As a member, he lobbied the government for fair immigration policies. Later, he went on to become the Director of the National Association of Canadians of Indian Origin (NACIO) in 1978-1979. Here he also lobbied the federal government for cultural preservation. In 1995, Sohan Singh went on to become the founder of the Shromania Sikh Services Society. Since 1968, he has been an active member of the Khalsa Diwan Sikh Society, the largest, and oldest Sikh organization in North America. Over the years, he has held many positions such as Executive Member, Treasurer, Secretary, Recording Secretary and President. In the community, Sohan Singh helped

in establishing organizations for youth and women through the Khalsa Diwan Society and Shriomani Sikh Services Society. He also helped set up counseling and refuge for women who were victims of abuse and set up facilities to help new immigrants successfully adapt to Canadian society.

To this day, Sohan Singh continues to be very active in the community and is currently the President of the Khalsa Diwan Society in Vancouver. He continues to live in Vancouver with his children and grandchildren keeping the legacy of his grandfather Asa Singh Deo alive.