



The Gurbaksh Dhaliwal Family

Bhagat Singh Dhaliwal of Chananwal, Punjab, arrived in BC in 1926 with his nephews Paul Singh Dhaliwal and Hari Singh Dhaliwal. It was common to send young men with an uncle who claimed them as his sons. Paul and Hari's father, Surinder Singh Dhaliwal was in the British army and never came to Canada. His younger brother raised his sons. When Indian people got the right to vote in 1947 they were required to declare who were their biological sons and whom they had informally "adopted". Hari Singh returned to India to get married. In 1948 he was joined in Canada by his wife Gurdev Kaur and a son Gurbaksh Singh Dhaliwal, born on August 28, 1934. A cousin, Balwant Singh Dhaliwal also came with them.

Gurbaksh Singh's youth was spent in Mission, BC where he went to school for four years before starting work because his father's health was suffering. Hari Singh passed away on Oct 5, 1957 when his son was only twenty-three years old.

The Dhaliwal family lived in Mission along with immigrants from many other countries. They helped new arrivals including Gurbaksh as he battled the loneliness of being in a foreign country. Gurbaksh returned to India to get married to Pritmohinder Kaur Grewal on August 14, 1957. They had three children, Hardip Kaur Dhaliwal born in 1958, Harvey Singh Dhaliwal born in 1960, and Pome Singh Dhaliwal born in 1962.

Photos clockwise from far left

Portrait of Gurbaksh Singh Dhaliwal's family taken in March 1963. From left: Gurbaksh Singh Dhaliwal, Pritmohinder Kaur Dhaliwal, three year old Harvey Singh Dhaliwal, five year old Hardip Kaur Dhaliwal, Gurdev Kaur Dhaliwal (mother), and one year old Pome Singh Dhaliwal.

Bhagat Singh Dhaliwal was Gurbaksh's grandfather's younger brother who came to Canada in 1908. At that time immigration was open to Indian people, so Bhagat Singh only needed to purchase a ticket in order to immigrate.

Matriarch Gurdev Kaur Dhaliwal came to Canada in 1948 as a young mother to join her husband and his family, leaving behind her extended family to create new beginnings in a foreign land. She quickly formed new roots and provided tremendous support to her family as they carved out a new life in a new country for their family.

Four year old Gurbaksh Singh Dhaliwal in 1938 in India. He lived with his mother and the extended family for fourteen years before joining his father. Extended families often took on the role of caregiver, supporter and parent for the young mother and children for long periods.

This formal portrait was taken on April 20, 1948, 22 years after Hari Singh Dhaliwal's arrival. (*standing on the right*). It also includes two of Hari's friends, Thakur Singh Ghuman and Puran Singh Gill. It is a testament to Hari Singh's commitment to his faith that he maintained his turban and full beard. The Dhaliwal brothers and their uncle successfully ran their own fuel hauling business called Paul Brothers Wood and Sawdust until 1963 when Gurbaksh Singh sold their trucks to Cornelius Klassen of Fraser Valley Pulp Company. The family also owned a number of buildings that they rented out to other businesses.

This photo was taken at Anchorage, Alaska, when the Canadian Pacific Airline from India stopped to refuel. Gurbaksh had returned to India to marry Pritmohinder Kaur Grewal on August 14, 1957. In the 1950's most men still returned to India to find Sikh brides. Gurbaksh recalled that in 1948, the Punjabi community was very small. In Toronto there were four bachelors, two families in Calgary (the Hari family and the Rama family), perhaps four or five families in Kamloops, three in Chilliwack, 11 in Agassiz, 10 – 20 families in Abbotsford, four or five families in Mission, and rest of the population was settled in New Westminster, Vancouver, Lake Cowichan, Duncan, Port Alberni. At that point there were only about 1800 Indian people in Canada.