

Gurbaksh Singh Dhaliwal

Gurbaksh Singh Dhaliwal was born on August 28, 1934 in the village of Chananwal, district Sangrur, Punjab. He arrived in Mission, BC on October 27, 1948 and was accompanied by his mother, Gurdev Kaur Dhaliwal and uncle, Balwant Singh Dhaliwal. The family came to join his father Hari Singh Dhaliwal, who by then had a well-established trucking business in Mission called "Paul Brothers Wood and Saw Dust." Hari Singh Dhaliwal owned about ten to eleven trucks at that time. Hari Singh and his cousin Paul Singh Dhaliwal had immigrated to Canada in 1926 because of their grandfather's brother, Bhagat Singh Dhaliwal. Bhagat Singh was the first in the family to have come to Canada in 1908.

Upon arrival, Gurbaksh Singh was enrolled in the seventh grade at Mission High. Being the youngest out of the other ten Indian children at school, he often felt very lonely and out of place primarily because of the language barrier. However, with the help of his teachers he was able to ease into the Canadian school system and learn to speak English. Unfortunately, Gurbaksh Singh had to drop out after grade 11 due to his father's health problems.

During his school years, Gurbaksh Singh obtained summer jobs working at saw mills in Mission, Lake Cowichan, and Honeymoon Bay. Since he was a student, he received a pay of 75 cents an hour, unlike the IWA (International Woodworkers Association) members who earned \$1.00 per hour. While working with the Western Forest Industry for 40 hours a week, Gurbaksh managed to save \$350.00 that summer. However, after his father became ill, he took over the family business and became a truck driver, which he continued to do from 1952 to 1963.

In 1948, Mission was a very diverse community with many immigrant groups settled there. Gurbaksh Singh's family owned eight lots of property on Horne Avenue (25ft/lot), which included their house and five shops. These shops were rented out to several other immigrant settlers such as French, Polish and Czech people to establish businesses. The shops consisted of a repair shop, restaurant, office, store for selling and repairing power saws and a store for sharpening them. In 1968, the property was sold to the city of Mission for the construction of the Mission bridge.

Gurbaksh Singh explains that in 1948, the population of Punjabi's in Canada was very small. There were four bachelors in Toronto and two families in Calgary (the Harry and Rama family). There were approximately four or five families in Kamloops, three in Chilliwack, one in Agassiz, two to three in Abbotsford, four to five in Mission and the rest of the population was in New Westminster, Vancouver, and Vancouver Island. At that time, the total population throughout Canada was 1800 Punjabi's, according to Gurbaksh Singh.

In June 1957, Gurbaksh Singh returned to India for the first time after his father urged him to settle down and get married. On August 14, 1957 Gurbaksh Singh married Prit Mohinder Kaur Grewal. However, Gurbaksh Singh's trip was cut short because he had to return to Canada due to his father's death on October 5, 1957. Prit Mohinder Kaur was able to join her husband and mother-in-law a few months later in January 1958.

Now settled in Mission, Gurbaksh Singh and Prit Mohiner Kaur started their family. On July 9, 1958 the couple was blessed with their daughter, Hardeep Kaur Dhaliwal. Two years later, on December 9, 1960, their son Harvey Singh Dhaliwal was born. The youngest son, Pooma Singh Dhaliwal was born on February 3, 1962.

Gurbaksh Singh left trucking in 1963 and sold his three trucks to the “Fraser Valley Pulp” for \$5000, the same price that his father paid for the trucks years earlier. He then began working for the “Watkins Saw Mill” until 1967. Later, he worked and became a shareholder and a Board of Director with the “Canadian Plywood Company” in New Westminster. In 1968, the family moved out to Surrey because their property in Mission was purchased by the highway commission to build the bridge. The “Canadian Plywood Company” later closed down and Gurbaksh Singh started to work for the “Acorn Forest Industry.” Then in 1989, he was offered a pension plan to retire since the company was closing down. After retiring, he worked in a security company for eight years, and officially retired in 1999.

Gurbaksh and Prit Mohinder still live in Abbotsford, B.C along with Gurbaksh’s mother Gurdev Kaur. The Dhaliwal family is still very involved with the Fraser Valley community and is very pleased with the work being conducted by the Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies to retain the history of the pioneers.