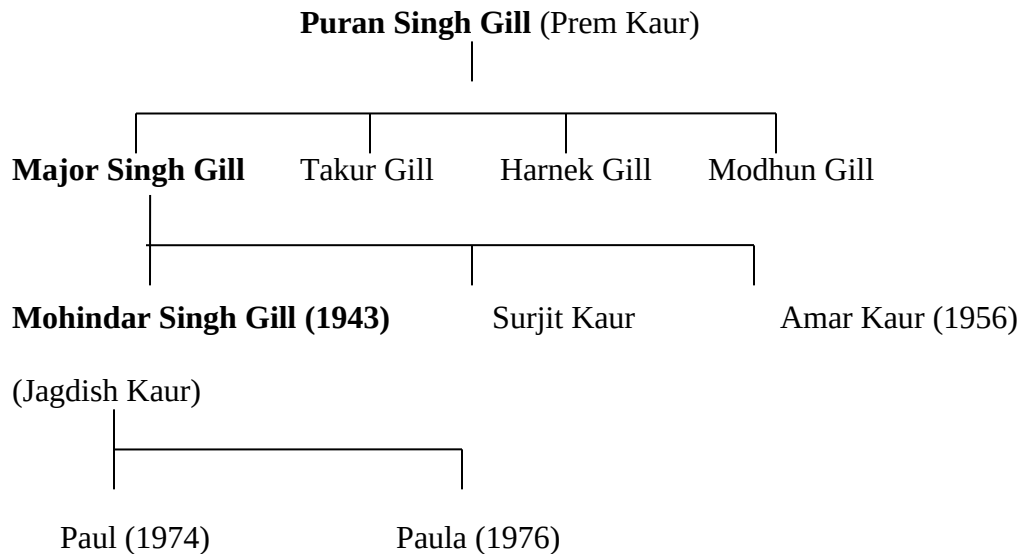


MOHINDAR (MOE) SINGH GILL



Mohindar (or 'Moe') Singh Gill was born on November 12, 1943 in the village of Chananwal, located in Punjab, India. He came to Canada as a young boy in October 1955 with his mother and younger sister. They took a plane from Calcutta and came through Hawaii and then came directly to Vancouver. Moe Singh's father, Major Singh Gill had already been in Canada for four years before Moe Singh's arrived with his mother and sister. Originally, Moe Singh's grandfather Puran Singh Gill came to Canada in 1923 to attend the University of British Columbia as a business student. He was one of the only two Indo-Canadian students that arrived in Canada who were given permission to take courses at the University. Puran Singh, along with the other student had travelled by boat to Hong Kong and from Hong Kong to San Francisco and then they took a train to Vancouver. Puran Singh took business courses but was unable to complete his education due to the lack of funding. Puran Singh lived in Vancouver during this time but after leaving University he moved from Alberta to the Vancouver Island.

Puran Singh sponsored his wife Prem Kaur and three sons, Takur, Harnek and Modhun in 1950 to join him in Canada. Moe Gill's father, Major Singh was not one of them as he was over the age limit that could travel with a mother. Puran Singh later filed an application for his son Major Singh to join them. The immigration department in Ottawa had fifty two pending applications of the people who had applied but weren't allowed to join their family in Canada. The Gills were lucky because at that time Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India had made an official delegation trip to Canada in 1949. Around this same time a delegation from Vancouver went to Ottawa by train and they had a meeting with Nehru requesting Mr. Nehru to convince the Federal Government to release these applications and process them. The talks were successful and as a result Major Singh, among hundreds of others were allowed to come to Canada. According to Moe, Puran Singh also served as President of the Khalsa Diwan Society heritage gurdwara for 10 years. This was so because Puran Singh became known for his writing skills when he used to live in a cook house on Vancouver Island. It was Puran Singh who did much of the letter writing for all the other men that were in the cook house. Therefore, when he became the president of the Gur Sikh temple in Abbotsford, he did much of the same thing, the paperwork for the society, etc.

In 1954 the whole family moved to Mission because Puran Singh got a new job, while Major Singh began working for Paul Dhaliwal, another prominent pioneer at the time, in the saw mill he was contracted to work on. Moe Gill and his younger uncle went to the same elementary school because they had only four years difference between them. Both Moe Gill and his Uncle were joined by Surjit, Moe's younger sister. Surjit was four years younger than Moe and by 1956 his other sister, Amar Kaur was born in Mission hospital.

Although Moe should have been in grade five according to his Indian credentials, the

school in Mission enrolled him back to grade two. Moe remembers enjoying his time playing in the playground in Mission located at 7th Avenue. One day, Moe came to know that the baseball team in the local playground was one person short so they asked him to join in. There were only Caucasian children in the game and he was the only Indo-Canadian child. In fact, the entire school had only six Indo-Canadian boys and two Indo-Canadian girls. After completing elementary school Moe attended high school but was unable to finish his schooling because he became ill with a chronic cough. Although he left the school at this time, Moe still completed his Grade 11 through correspondence.

For his first job, Moe worked for two years at the 'Harman Sawmill.' His first position was as a stack boy where he was paid \$0.90 an hour and later on this was raised to \$1.10. Moe's second job included working for the Whonnak lumber company located nearby Maple Ridge for twelve years. At the time, the Whonnak lumber company wasn't hiring any Indo-Canadians because earlier one of the Indo-Canadian employees had gotten into a confrontation with the superintendent. The superintendent, being very upset refused to hire any more Indo-Canadians. By hiring Moe, this 'rule' was now broken. Moe did almost everything at the Whonnak sawmill except sawing the lumber; such tasks included training as a grader and then working as a grader. Interestingly enough, both Major Singh and Puran Singh had worked in the company prior to Moe-leaving it as a site for three generations of the Gill family's employment. The Gill family owned a house on the plant, and were soon able to purchase two additional lots on the corner of 7th and Thalloid where they built another house in 1967.

In January 1969, Moe and his mother went back to India where he married Jagdish Cheema in April. He came back and filled an application for his wife and she arrived in Canada soon after in September 1969. They had a son Paul in 1974, who formerly worked with BCTV as

film editor, and a daughter Pala in 1976, who is a school teacher at Eugene Reimer Middle School. In the same year that Pala was born, Puran Singh, the Gill family patriarch passed away.

In 1975 Moe and Major Singh purchased a 10 acre raspberry farm located on Huntington road in Abbotsford which was worth \$115,000 at that time. Moe quit his job at this time and began working on the farm alongside Major Singh. A few years later the entire family moved to Abbotsford from Mission and in 1978 built a new house on their farm.

Because of his ownership of a vibrant local farm, Moe also became very involved in the local agricultural associations. The first of these was called the Cole Crop Growers Association. Within his role in the Association, Moe was eventually brought into the marketing board.

Whilst Moe's children attended Abby Senior School after finishing their elementary schooling at South Popular School, George Perry (former Mayor of Abbotsford) was their principal. Moe became good friends with George and eventually decided to run in the local Abbotsford municipal election for first time in 1986 but did not win. From this point on, local community members began rallying around Moe and encouraging him to try again in the next election. As a result, Moe ran four more times and lost each time. Despite these initial losses, Moe refused to lose his spirit and eventually won the sixth time. During this time in Moe's life as he was beginning to see such immense success, his mentor, guide, and father, Major Singh passed away in 1993. Soon after, when Moe won his first election, his mother also passed away. Moe Singh Gill was elected in December 1995 as the first Indo-Canadian councilor in Abbotsford, BC. He received 3000 Indo-Canadian votes. Since 1995 he has been elected every year, a very successful run indeed. Since his election he has been an influential community member and advocate for the City of Abbotsford.

When reflecting on his wonderful family history and the family's contribution to

community, Moe Gill says *“I look at the community to be the ‘whole’ community, being the best community in Canada and the best community in BC. That’s what you want from your community. You want your community to be successful not only in one area, but all areas they venture into. That’s what you want.”* Certainly, the family legacy of Puran Singh Gill, Major Singh Gill, and Mohan Singh Gill is testament to the contributions of all families in building wonderful communities.