

Nazar Singh Gill

Hailing from the village Dhudike, District Moga, Nazar Singh Gill, born May 18th 1933 came to Canada for the first time on January 1, 1963. At the age of 30, Nazar Singh Gill travelled to another country for a better life along with his one and half year-old daughter, Kero Kaur Gill. He boarded a plane from Delhi to Hong Kong and then from Hong Kong to Vancouver paying \$650 to come to a new country in the hopes of achieving a better life for his family and himself. Nazar did not carry much luggage while travelling across the country. He just bought a couple of shirts, and a blanket to cover his daughter and himself from the cold weather in Canada. His main purpose of coming to Canada was to make more money and live a better life.

Somewhere between the years 1912-1915, Nazar Singh's father-in-law had come to Canada before him to start a new chapter. Nazar Singh's wife, Bachan Kaur Gill, although born in India, became a Canadian citizen at the time of her birth since her father registered her birth in Canada. In 1952, Bachan Kaur left her native country India joining her father in Canada. Sponsored by his wife, Nazar Singh then left his home in Dhudike to begin a new chapter in his life.

Nazar Singh initially started to work at the Harman Saw Mill (owned by Harman Braich) in Mission. He started off with a pay of \$1.50 per hour while fellow employees that had been working there previously made \$1.60 - \$1.70 an hour. He worked nine to ten hours a day. There were about 25 men that worked there at that time. Nazar Singh was referred to the job by his uncle who had lived in Langley since 1932. Nazar Singh and his family lived in a small house in the mill where they paid a monthly rent of \$26 per month to the mill owner, Harman Braich. Back then, the food was not very expensive; their grocery bills were usually \$150-200 a month. Since the grocery stores were nearby they did not purchase a car and used to simply walk everywhere. After working at the Harman Saw Mill for three and half years, Nazar began working in a different mill called the Banks Mill that was owned by a Caucasian person. They also moved out of their previous house and moved into a basement owned by South Asians. The rent for the basement was \$60 a month. At Banks Mill, Nazar Singh began earning the union wages, which was somewhere between \$2.75- 2.76 per hour, which were much higher than what he earned at his previous job. The Banks Mill closed down in 1992; however, the company that ran Banks Mill also ran another mill called the Bay Lumber in Pitt Meadows. Due to his seniority, Nazar Singh got a job at this other mill. By the time of his retirement in 1992 Nazar Singh was earning \$24 an hour. Nazar Singh worked very hard in his lifetime and at one point, he used to sleep for only two to four hours a day while his wife was a stay at home mother and took care of the children and the house.

Nazar Singh came to Canada hoping to attain citizenship and earning a good name for himself and his family. He built a nice house and bought land for farming. He also wanted to return back to India after earning all that he wanted to. However, when he started working and became a citizen, his dream of going back to India was forgotten. He went back to India with his wife and daughter after 17 years on December 15, 1967. At this time, Nazar Singh Gill's full family included his mother, father, two sisters, and three brothers who were all in India. He then sponsored his parents and siblings to migrate to Canada. Sponsoring a family member in the 1960's was fairly uncomplicated because all one needed was \$1000 in their bank account and a letter stating where the sponsoring person worked and his wages, and this application usually was approved in six to seven months.

According to Nazar Singh he did not face many problems after coming to Canada except for the language barrier. He had attended school until grade seven in India but had only learned basic English words such as 'yes,' 'no,' 'hello,' etc. However, both Nazar Singh and his wife Bachan Kaur improved their English by watching TV and speaking with colleagues at work. Nazar Singh recalls

how the Caucasian people were very nice as they always helped Nazar in learning English and corrected him without making fun of him if he said something wrong.

One of the greater achievement Nazar Singh made soon after his arrival to Canada was when he bought a car in the 1960's for \$1600- a Valiant. This was when he realized that he achieved something while living in Canada. Nazar Singh and Bachan Kaur had six children: five daughters and one son. One daughter was born in India and the rest were born in Canada. All his children were schooled in Canada.

Nazar Singh recalls that the community back then in Canada was very tight knit and helpful. He is very happy that he made the decision to come to Canada. He appreciates the growth he had all through his life and how he helped his family get settled and live a blessed life.