

Kerpaul Kaur and Sucha Singh Hayer

Kerpaul Kaur Hayer's grandfather Diwan Singh Sall, arrived to Canada on a ship in 1907. Diwan Singh worked at a sawmill on Vancouver Island for a while and after returning to India in the late 1930's, he permanently stayed there. In the late 1930's, Beant Singh Sall, Kerpaul Kaur's father came to Canada. He later returned to India and married Nasib Kaur and came back in 1951. Kerpaul Kaur Sall was born December 5, 1951. She was only nine months when her and her mother arrived to Canada on a CPR steamship in September, 1952. They travelled from Calcutta to Hong Kong and then to San Francisco. From there, the infant Kerpaul Kaur and her mother Nasib Kaur boarded a train and proceeded to Vancouver. Kerpaul Kaur recalls stories that her mother used to tell her about the journey to Canada on the ship. She explains that since she was the only baby on the ship, everyone would want to play with her. At the time, there were mostly single men and very few women travelling on the ship. Nasib Kaur Sall travelled with her sister-in-law, Gurbachan Kaur Sall. She was the wife of Beant Singh's cousin, Kabul Singh Sall, Kerpaul Kaur's *chacha* (father's younger cousin).

During WWII, many young Canadian men left to fight and as a result, there was a great shortage of labour. It was at this time that many Indian men were able to find work in the mills. However, the Indian and Chinese were paid \$0.10 per hour and the Caucasians received \$0.25 per hour. This wage difference shows a lot about the work environment and the inequalities of the time. It was in 1935 when this wage difference finally changed when the International Woodworkers of America (IWA) union was formed advocating for equal pay for everyone.

Beant Singh and Kabul Singh Sall both worked at the Hillcrest sawmill in Mesachie Lake. Near the mill, there were about three to four bunk houses and a cookhouse for the bachelors. With that, there were also nine homes adjacent to the mill. These homes were given to families for very low rent (around \$20) including hydro and heat. The Sall family lived in the mill home for a total of 16 years.

Kerpaul Kaur had two other siblings both born in Duncan, a younger brother Surjit Singh born on August 4, 1959 and passed away on May 19, 1989, and a sister Kuldeep Kaur who was born on June 17, 1954. Growing up, Kerpaul Kaur's family kept their own cows, chickens, and a garden for home grown vegetables. The cooking was all conducted on wood stoves and when they ran out of wood, a truck from the mill always come by and dropped off more. In 1968, the Hillcrest sawmill shut down and many families moved out of Mesachie Lake. The Sall family moved to Duncan and at the time, Kerpaul Kaur was in grade 12. When Kerpaul Kaur graduated from high school, she received a scholarship and wanted to pursue a post-secondary education in biology and math in Vancouver. However, her father was a bit concerned about her moving on her own. As a result, the whole family moved to Vancouver on August, 1969. Her father bought a house on 57th Street between Main and Fraser St.

After a while, Kerpaul Kaur's sister in-law told her that she could get a good job in a bank and even if she studied more, she would not necessarily be earning more. After considering this, Kerpaul Kaur applied and obtained a job in the Bank of Montreal on Main St. During the stay in Vancouver, she mentions that the whole family including her didn't enjoy living in Vancouver. The city life was too much hustle and bustle in comparison to the easy life on the island. Because of this, Kerpaul Kaur transferred to the same bank on the Island and the entire Sall family moved back to Duncan in March of 1970. Before shifting to Vancouver, the family had owned 27 acres of property with a home built on it. Since they kept this property in their possession even after moving to the mainland, they returned to the same home. Beant Singh Sall had purchased this property in the early 1960's for approximately \$7000. After her father passed away in 1974, the family sold the property in 1980 for nearly \$300 000.

On July 30, 1972, Kerpaul Kaur married Sucha Singh Hayer. The couple lived in an apartment for one year and later on built their own house. Sucha Singh's family was good friends with the Sall family, primarily through Kabul Singh Sall. This in turn led to their arranged marriage. When Sucha Singh had first arrived to Canada in 1967, he only worked at the Hillcrest mill for three or four weeks and then in 1968 he began attending school in Nanaimo in the auto mechanics program.

Sucha Singh and Kerpaul Kaur had their first baby son, Sandesh (Sandy), on February 18, 1976 at the Duncan Hospital. Their second son, Reggie Manraj, was born on May 20, 1980. At the time of their marriage Sucha Singh was working at the Chemainus Sawmill and his wife was in the Bank of Montreal. Kerpaul Kaur was supervisor of all the deposit accounts at the bank and when her children came along, she left the job to raise her family. She stayed home until her younger son began attending grade two, then she started doing income tax for her friend in the time between her children were at school. Later she took a bookkeeping course. In 1994, Kerpaul Kaur worked in an accounting office for three and a half years. Currently she works as a bookkeeper for a businessman and has been there for 16 years.

Sucha Singh explains that in 1968 when the mill shut down, the gurdwara at Hillcrest was moved to Lake Cowichan. The Hillcrest gurdwara was located on the mill's property and all the light and heating was provided by the mill. At the time, major celebrations were divided between the different gurdwaras in the area. India's Independence Day was celebrated at the Mesachie Lake gurdwara, Vaisakhi was celebrated at Victoria's gurdwara, and Canada Day was at the Paldi gurdwara. These days would hold special importance for the community and people from as far as Vancouver would come to attend. These were exciting times when everyone would get together and even arrive a few days earlier. Kerpaul Kaur recalls how her mother would be busy with preparations and chores such as finding mattresses and washing linens for the guests that would arrive.

A major point that both Mr. and Mrs. Hayer would like to mention is the noticeable change with our Punjabi community now. In the past, people used to make the effort to find out who their Indian neighbours were and where they were from. The word *apnay* (our people) would be used in the literal sense and this brought a sense of family within the Indian community at the time. Sucha Singh recalls that when he first arrived from India, he attended the Vaisakhi celebrations at the Lake Cowichan gurdwara. At that time, everyone from the town came to greet him and introduce themselves. According to Kerpaul Kaur, we are losing our family values. Everyone is already preoccupied with so much that these simple things are being forgotten. She would encourage our community to get to know each other and even embrace other cultures. We should keep our identity but also be more a part of what happens around the community.