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Fashion



GURBAKHSH NARANG

Gurbakhsh Narang was born in Sidney, British Columbia, in 1931 but it wasn't until 18 years later that Canada became his permanent home. In 1935, unable to find enough work, Gurbax's father, Bhagat, decided to take his wife and two children back to India.

By the time Gurbax was 18 years old, in 1949, his father was in poor health and the family was struggling to make a living from the two acres of land they owned in the village of Dhudike, Punjab.

Gurbax's mother, Harman, suggested that it would be best for everyone if he returned to Canada and established himself. "My dad felt I was too young but I agreed with my mother and convinced him it would be good for the family because I could send money back home," recalls Gurbax.

Gurbax made the trip to Canada in sev-

eral stages. He describes the journey from Calcutta to Hong Kong via Singapore as "miserable." He bought passage on a freighter for 200 rupees and spent the next two weeks afraid for his life. "I slept on the deck and the sea was rough. It seemed like we would be drowned any time. I was so scared, I didn't even care about my passport or my luggage," he says.

Life improved when he reached Hong Kong, where he was greeted at the dock by Chinese employees of the local gurudwara. Gurbakhsh lived at the gurudwara for the next 13 days and was joined there by others traveling from India to Canada.

When he boarded the General Gordon, a former military ship, he was one of about 30 Indian men and women traveling from Hong Kong to San Francisco via Tokyo. After landing in San Francisco, Gurbakhsh boarded a train for B.C.



"I still have my first passport," he says. "It was stamped at White Rock on Nov. 25, 1949, when I entered Canada."

Gurbakhsh felt like a "newborn" in his unfamiliar surroundings but he wasn't all alone in this new world. "My uncle received me at the CN station close to Main Street and we stayed overnight at his friend's place before traveling to the island."

For more than two years, Gurbakhsh lived and worked at a sawmill in Great Central Lake, about 12 miles from Port Alberni. The work was hard but life in the small, closeknit community was good, he says.

"There were about 30 of us living in the bunkhouse," he says. "I was happy, my co-workers were happy."

When he travelled to Port Alberni to attend a get-together at the local gurudwara, Gurbakhsh was overwhelmed by his warm reception. "The people in the community, many of whom remembered my dad, treated me very well. Some called me nephew, everyone invited me to their home. There was so much love in those days."

Free time was scarce for Gurbakhsh. He worked 12 to 16 hours a day so he could save money to send back to his family in India. Once every two weeks, he and a few of his co-workers would head to Port Alberni for the day to visit friends and catch a "cowboy movie in the theatre."

"It cost 25 cents," he recalls. "I still remember my first film. It was a Roy Rogers movie and he had a horse that would climb up the stairs."

By 1952, when the mill at Great Central Lake closed down, Gurbakhsh had managed to bring his father to Canada. Shortly after, the two men bought their first house in Canada. "We bought a house with a basement in Port Alberni for \$3,500," says Gurbakhsh. □

Today, Gurbakhsh lives with his wife, Rani, in Abbotsford. They raised four children and have eight grandchildren.