

## WHO AM I?

(Hardev Singh Shergill)

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<http://sikhbulletin.com/Bulletins/SikhBulletinNovDec2018.pdf>

1. I was born in **Sakruli**, a village in District Hoshiarpur, Panjab, India on **January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1934**, in the same house where my mother was born, as per custom for first born births in those days.
2. At the age of two I moved to our new ancestral home, **village 35BB**, in Ganganagar District of Bikaner State, not part of British governed part of India that Panjab was. This village was founded by my Grandparents in **1927** when Maharaja Ganga Singh of Bikaner State brought Panjabi farmers to cultivate irrigated farming with water purchased by him from the British rulers of Panjab since his citizens were not familiar with irrigated farming practices. This part is the eastern end of the Great Sahara Desert that stretches east from the Atlantic coast of North Africa.

My village was very small, only six land owning families, and a dozen farm workers' families, but it was self sufficient to meet the necessities of life. Village women were the cotton ginners who separated seed from the fiber with hand operated machines; we had one family who had a cotton seed mill operated by ox power, that extracted oil from the cotton seed and solid residue became diet for milk buffalo that was kept for milking instead of cows as in many countries; village women spun cotton into thread with hand operated spinning wheel which the village weaver turned into cotton blankets; water carrier who supplied pitchers of water to households drawn out from village water storage tank; Kotwal, the Courier between Numberdar of the village, my Grandfather, and the government administrators; our own carpenter who made and repaired farm equipment and built homes and thrilled children by making playing equipment and toys out of wood; we made our own hockey sticks from young branches of acacia tree that had a natural curve which we accentuated by heating it on the open fire and built our own balls from pebbles, cloth and thread and needle.

Plans for our village and all other canal irrigated villages were prepared by the British Engineers hired by the Maharaja and our village had building plots assigned for the use of all the skilled workers enumerated above and my grandfather scouted Panjab to persuade them to settle in our village.

Every year the world came to our village which included snake charmers, domesticated bear show, trained monkey show, acrobats, puppet show, kabbadi and wrestling matches and the ***gaddian wale***, whom the western world knows as Gypsies and they call themselves Roma and Romani. They were so good at metal working, it was awe inspiring to see them convert village's discarded metal containers and other discarded metal objects into useable articles and toys; they were so good at turning metal into weapons of war that every invader of India took some back with them, may be starting as early as Alexander the Great. And now they are on every continent but instead of ox power in India they switched to horse power in flesh in Europe and now ultimately machines whose strength is measured in horse power.

In 1961, soon after arriving at Western Washington State College, I got a job at the College Library at \$1.00 an hour, the going rate. One dollar went a long way then; it could buy Swanson's Turkey TV Dinner that costs \$14.99 today. But the thing that I remember most of working there is coming across a book. My job there was shelving in their proper place the returned books.

One day I came across **Irving Brown's book 'Gypsy Fires in America'** and was surprised to find that these European Gypsies were the same people who visited our village in my childhood and spoke the same language. Language of course changes with distance and by coming into contact with other languages. But I did make a list of common words. Here is a small sample:

*katar aves prala? Whence come you brother?*

*Dikhlian amare roman? Have you seen any of our people?*

*Devla! Devla! So, me kardia? O' God! O God! What have I done?*

*Janas tu? (Do you know?)*

*Tato pani (Hot water)*

*De la Chumi. lai la chumi. Give me kiss, take a kiss.)*

*Kalo Roma San tu? Are you a black Gypsy?*

That is a question a **white Gypsy** (through inter marriages with white Europeans) would ask his darker cousins. Here are some examples of **white Gypsies**, in addition to an **American President who had 25% Gypsy blood:**

*British actor Michael Caine, Charlie Chaplin, American actor Yul Brynner, Elvis Presley, Bob Hoskins, Pablo Picasso, Rita Hayworth...*

**My village was a laboratory for me!**

On September **1<sup>st</sup> 1936** a Primary School opened, literally in our own family compound, in the cattle quarters, spruced up for the school that got its own facilities within few months. School was one of two gifted by the Maharaja to our Tahsil Padampur (An administrative unit) that received the other school. School started with 18 students, 15 of whom were from 35BB, other 3 from three surrounding villages. Since the school was in our own family compound, I started attending school from its very inception although registration commenced in pre-school in **1940**. School day started with all students lined up to repeat after one senior student praying for long life of Maharaja Ganga Singh, as the British do for their kings and queens to this day.

This was followed by **lesson in Civics** and cleanliness. To this day, because of habit created then, I pick up odd pieces of paper on a public wash room floor if the wash room is kept clean and the floor is not filled with paper.

The day ended with everybody lined up again and this time repeating after a senior student multiplication Tables up to 40. Then out of village students would leave and rest of us play football until dusk.

Talking about Civics, my adopted country needs it badly, starting with every member of Lincoln's party, the Republican Party, from Mitch McConnell down to the last member. Even President Trump could certainly benefit from it. He is the President and he has taken this oath:

**"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my Ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States", of which he knows nothing.**

Education was new to our family of ancestral farmers. It caught interest of my Grandfather when the Tehsildar inquired of my Grandfather if there were any educated members of the family whom he could offer jobs. None of my ancestors had ever gone to school because there were none. My uncle, **Gurbax Singh Shergill**, six years older than I, was one of 18 students in the founding class. After graduating with Master's Degree in Economics from **Khalsa College Amritsar**, a premier Sikh Institution, established by the British in **1892**, he started his educating career as Vice Principal of **Sikh National College Banga**, relocated from **Lahore** after partition of Panjab in **1947** and eventually became **Principal of that college**. His next job was as **founding Principal of Khalsa College Chandigarh**, brand new capital of Indian Panjab, planned by the famous French architect Le Corbusier. From there he was persuaded by the management committee of Khalsa College Amritsar to become the Principal of his **Alma mater**. Upon retiring from there he was appointed Chairman of **Panjab Education Board**.

My uncle was my Role Model, my Idol and I followed in his footsteps. Upon completing Master's degree in Geography at age 21 followed by B. Ed., my first job was as a Professor at a Teacher training College. Two months into the job I was promoted to Vice-Principalship. That was followed by teaching Geography at the Air Force Central School in New Delhi for two years and from there I took off for adventures in my life.

In **1960** I received admission to the **University of Washington** in Seattle, Washington for Ph, D. in Geography. My grandfather gave me \$1200.00 to meet first year's expenses at the University. One-way airfare from New Delhi to Seattle was also about \$1200.00. The latter was no problem because I did not intend to fly. I was going to hitch-hike from New Delhi to Seattle with just the US Army second world war back pack, entrusting to a friend a metal trunk full of my clothes and other necessities to be shipped by sea to arrive in Seattle by end of September. On September 21<sup>st</sup> 1960, I arrived in Seattle having left New Delhi on June 24<sup>th</sup> 1960.

*This is what the last passage in my diary of September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1960 reads:*

*"This is the end of my 3 months' adventures and my mission fulfilled. It has cost me only \$18.00 from New Delhi to here. \$15.00 up to London; free across the Atlantic; \$3.00 up to Yuba City; and nothing up to here and a distance of:*

*New Delhi to London 6,800 miles*

*Bristol to Houston 5,400 miles*

*Houston to Seattle 3,000 miles*

*Total of 15,200 miles*

*Miraculous!*

*Received \$1152.00 from home and plus what I have with me (\$60.00), I am starting my living in States with roughly \$1200.00.”*

This trip was dream come true. In Pakistan and Iran, I stayed with Muslim and Sikh families, respectively, whose addresses I had brought from their family members living in New Delhi. **Upon entering Turkey, I was left to my own devices, all the way to England and Seattle, Washington.**

The nicest and most helpful people I came across were the **Turkish and Yugoslavs, the worst being British.** I was most concerned about my reception in Turkey, a member country of **CENTO**, President Eisenhower’s Secretary of **State John Foster Dulles’** military alliance along with **SEATO** to encircle two communist countries, China and Russia. India under Jawaher Lal **Nehru** remained non-aligned that John Foster Dulles considered a hostile stance. His motto was **‘if you are not with us you are against us’.** Egypt’s **Nasser**, communist country Yugoslavia’s **Tito**, Indonesia’s Sukarno and Ghana’s Nkrumah were the only other world leaders that joined **Nehru** against United States’ hegemony.



Hardev S. Shergill 1960 hitch hiking, location unknown; could be Turkey near Greek border.



Hardev S. Shergill, Paris, Aug. 5<sup>th</sup> 1960 in Borrowed Clothes



Lady Bird and Linda Johnson in the Stonewall Jackson Centennial Parade, Wimberley, TX.  
Picture from The Radio Post,



Hardev S. Shergill Sept. 5<sup>th</sup> 1960 Fredericksburg, Texas.  
1<sup>st</sup> day in USA. Picture from The Radio Post, same day.



Seattle Times Friday, September 23, 1960.  
Sikh Here Finds Travel Inexpensive  
H. S. Shergill



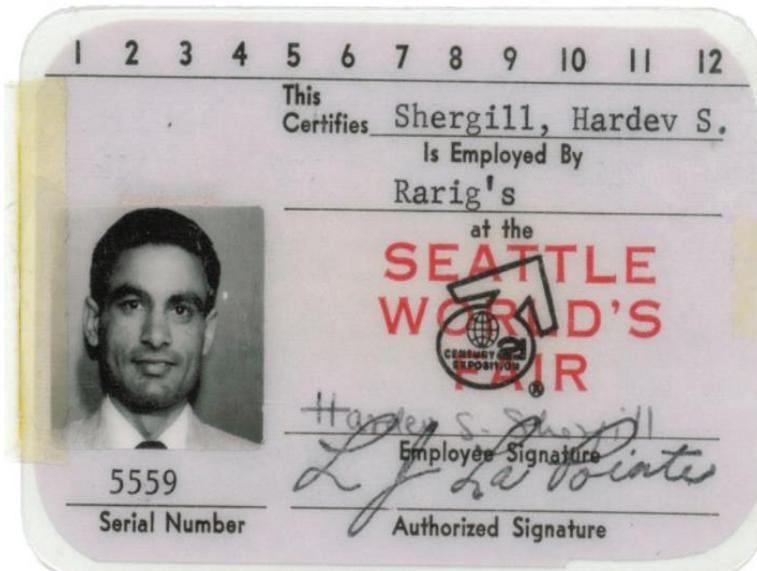
Seattle Post-Intelligencer, September 23, 1960.  
*H. Sheik (Sic) Shergill shows  
How He Hitchhiked 6,800 Miles*



Hardev (black-and-white) Russ Clift  
Bellingham, Washington  
Best Men's Portrait  
The National Professional Photographer, Oct. 1961.



Hardev S. Shergill Dec 14<sup>th</sup> 1961 operating elevators at Macy's  
Bellingham, Washington



Hardev S. Shergill  
April 21-Aug. 10, 1962  
Seattle World's Fair A-V support

University of Washington had a superb program for guiding the foreign students. The Director of the program inquired about my objectives. I told him I wanted to see the world by teaching in the various English-speaking countries that were coming out of British Colonialism around the world. His advice was that getting Ph. D. in Geography is not what I should want. He advised me to get **Master's Degree in Audio-Visual Education** that they had started that year in two of State's Teacher Training Colleges, one in the interior and one in Bellingham.

In **January 1961** I chose **Western Washing State College, now Western Washington University, in Bellingham**, because of its location on the coast, not too much extremes in the climate and its proximity to Vancouver, British Columbia and its Sikh community.

In **1961** while studying I started writing letters to the English-speaking countries in Central America and western Africa but responses were not very encouraging. They had already started getting educators, at no cost to them, through the efforts of the United Nations and wanted me to apply from within India.

In the United States **President Kennedy** had announced the formation of what came to be known as **Peace Corps**. He first mentioned the idea on **October 14, 1960, at 2 a.m.** to a crowd of 10,000 cheering students at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor during a presidential campaign speech. In his improvised speech, Kennedy asked, "*How many of you, who are going to be doctors, are willing to spend your days in Ghana? Technicians or engineers, how many of you are willing to work in the Foreign Service and spend your lives traveling around the world?*"

His young audience responded to this speech with a petition signed by 1,000 students willing to serve abroad. Senator Kennedy's challenge to these students—to live and work in developing countries

around the world; to dedicate themselves to the cause of peace and development—inspired the beginning of the **Peace Corps**.

Just two weeks later, in his November 2, 1960, speech at the Cow Palace in San Francisco, Kennedy proposed "*a peace corps of talented men and women*" *who would dedicate themselves to the progress and peace of developing countries*. Encouraged by more than 25,000 letters responding to his call, Kennedy took immediate action as president to make the campaign promise a reality. **The Peace Corps was established by executive order on March 1, 1961.**

**Oh, how I wished to be part of that!** That was my dream opportunity but there was one big hitch. I was not a US citizen, not even an immigrant. But my opportunity came soon and in totally unexpected ways. **In 1962, by Order-in-Council PC 1962-86, 1962 Canada modified its immigration policy** that eliminated overt racial discrimination from Canadian immigration policy. Skill became the main criteria for determining admissibility rather than race or national origin. I had applied for immigration to Canada from India in **1957**, soon after appearing for B.Ed. examination, but my application was rejected, without explanation.

By **March 1962** I had finished all of my course requirements for **M. Ed. Degree**. US policy allowed the foreign students to obtain employment during the summer break but it required documentation from the Institution. Head of my Department, **Dr. McDonald**, refused to sign the relevant form. Disappointed and puzzled I mentioned my dilemma to a fellow student who was

resident of Bellingham. That city had a strong presence of **Ku Klux Klan** and **Dr. McDonald** was a long-term member of that group. But he suggested an alternative, going over Dr. McDonald's head to his boss, the **Dean**. Dean had no hesitation in signing the required document.

**The same fellow student also told me that no non-white person could spend the night in Bellingham because the hotels would not rent a room to him.** The same, he said is true of **entire State of Oregon**. That explained to me the strange experience I had on my last night in my hitchhiking journey. It was **September 20<sup>th</sup>**. I had left Hazara Singh's ranch near **Chico**, northern California, in the morning. After several rides I ended up in **Albany, Oregon**. Dusk was falling rapidly and it was chilly.

I requested my last ride to drop me at the police station thinking, mistakenly, that police everywhere would be as helpful as in Texas and Arizona. When the police refused to shelter me for the night, I requested the gentleman to put me on the highway again.

It was dark on the highway and the fast-going cars could not have spotted me. I started walking away from the city in the hope of finding a gas station. Half mile down the road I found two, but in both places the teenage attendants were indifferent, rude and unhelpful. Not only they were not going to allow me to spend the night away from the cold, they told me, in response to my question, that there were motels down the road but they will be all full.

I walked half mile back in the head lights of freeway traffic to get across from an abandoned shed I had scouted earlier. Shed was abandoned but next to it was a gate to some factory. I walked to the locked gate and spotted a watchman. At first, he refused me permission to spend the night in that shed but when I stated to him that I was a student on my way to the University of Washington and this was my last night of hitchhiking from New Delhi, he relented as he stated that he too used to hitch rides when he was young. My last night of this journey, in the forests of Oregon, was cold and damp.

In **1962** when I was experiencing this strange hatred from **Dr. McDonald**, I had no knowledge of what had transpired in Bellingham 55 years earlier. **The Bellingham riots occurred on September 4, 1907**, in [Bellingham, Washington](#), United States.<sup>[1]</sup> A mob of 400–500 white men, predominantly members of the [Asiatic Exclusion League](#), with intentions to exclude [East Indian](#) immigrants from the work force of the local lumber mills, attacked the homes of the South Asian Indians.<sup>[2]</sup> The Indians were mostly [Sikhs](#) but were labelled as [Hindus](#) by much of the media of the day.<sup>[3]</sup>

The mob threw the East Indian workers into the streets, beat them, and pocketed their valuables. The authorities co-operated with the mob by corralling the beaten Indian immigrants into the City Hall, ostensibly for their safety.<sup>[4]</sup> "By the next day 125 South Asians had been driven out of town and were on their way to British Columbia".<sup>[5]</sup> Six Indians were hospitalized; no one was killed. About 400 were held in the Bellingham Jail, reportedly under "[protective custody](#)". No participants in the mob violence were prosecuted.<sup>[6]</sup>

Some victims of the riots migrated to [Everett, Washington](#) where two months later, they received similar treatment.<sup>[7]</sup> Similar [riots](#) occurred during this period in [Vancouver, BC](#)<sup>[8]</sup> and [California](#).<sup>[9]</sup>

In recognition of the 100th anniversary of the riots, [Whatcom County](#) Executive [Pete Kremen](#) and Bellingham Mayor [Tim Douglas](#) jointly proclaimed **Sept. 4, 2007, a "Day of Healing and Reconciliation,"** acknowledging and atoning for those regrettable events.<sup>[10]</sup>

**Panjabis now grow berries on both sides of the International border and own substantial amount of acreage between Bellingham and the border and are a major contributor to the economy of that former remote back yard of the country.**

By **mid-March 1962** I had moved to Seattle to work for Rarig Motion Picture Company which had audio-visual equipment contract at the **Seattle World's Fair** and also some hours at the Indian Government Pavilion. Our office was in the basement of the **Space Needle**. **The Fair opened on April 21<sup>st</sup>.**

On **May 4, 1962** I received a letter from the Western Washington State Graduate School that I have passed the Qualifying Exam and that the Graduation ceremonies will take place on **June 8<sup>th</sup> 1962.**

In the meanwhile, I had also applied for immigration to Canada and on **May 12, 1962** mailed my medical exam report.

**Uncle Beant Singh**, who had moved to Vancouver with his family some years ago, having been sponsored by his Canadian Citizen father-in-law, had informed me of Canada's new immigration policy when I was working at the Seattle World's Fair. I contacted the Minister of Immigration office in Ottawa to get the details. They were simple. They sent me the addresses of all the Education Departments in the Provinces and the Union Territories; asked me to get a letter of appointment and mail it to them; they will arrange for a medical exam in Seattle; when they have the appointment letter and medical results, they will issue a letter of entry.

**June 21<sup>st</sup> 1962**, I received the letter of appointment from the **Nelson School District**, without an interview. I will be teaching Geography and Social Studies to Jr. and Sr. High School grades in **Salmo**.

**June 30<sup>th</sup> 1962** was my day, I received my immigration permit from the Minister of immigration in Ottawa.

**August 11<sup>th</sup> 1962**, Saturday, at 3:30pm my dream to live in Canada arrived, five years after when it was first denied, when I checked in at Douglas border crossing at Blaine, Washington with the letter from the Minister of Immigration. ***"They must have liked you, up there in Ottawa, very much".*** These were the words greeting me from the Canadian Immigration officer at the **Blaine border** when he saw my immigration permit category.

By special request to the Minister of Immigration five years later, I received my Citizenship Certificate dated August 11, Friday 1967, exactly five years after arriving into Canada.

First thing I did was to buy a used Karmann ghia with money borrowed from uncle and head south on Highway 101 to Disneyland.

## Teaching in Canadian School System:

### 1962-1963 School District #7 (Nelson) British Columbia.

### 1963-1965 School District #35 (Langley) British Columbia.

**Langley** is 34 miles from Vancouver. I always wanted to settle down at a place that was about 30 miles from a big city, but not in it. British Columbia Schools' policy was to employ teachers on probation the first year. If their teaching passed the test their positions became permanent. Since I started thinking of Langley as my future home, I accepted an invitation to join the local **Lions Club**. If that invitation had not come, I would have sought one. They immediately made me **Secretary of the Club**. I chose a service club as the vehicle for me to integrate with the community that I was going to call home.

Any time I think of Langley, I am reminded of a great contrast between now and 1963 when it comes to mail delivery. Langley then was a small village with no home delivery; everybody had a mail box. There was a surprise for me in my mail box one day. It was an **aerogramme**. For the younger generation, an **aerogramme** is a **sheet of light paper folded and sealed to form a letter for sending by airmail**. It was from my Idol uncle who was then the Principal of Khalsa College **Banga**, Panjab, India. It was addressed simply to:

**Hardev Singh Shergill**  
**Langley**  
And in red ink "**Try Canada**"

Because it was an aerogramme, it was meant to go to England only; England had only one Langley; the Post Master knew there was no Hardev Singh Shergill in his Langley; so, he forwarded it to Canada that had only one Langley and that is where the letter found me, **clearly postmarked 'Banga' four days before it was delivered.**

During the summer of 1964 the Langley School District advertised a position of **District Audio-Visual Director**. I thought my dream job had come. My M.Ed. degree programme was so new, I was the only one in the entire country with that degree. University of British Columbia had started sending one of the Professors from College of Education to Portland Oregon for three summers to get that degree. The job that I applied for went to a recent graduate of University of British Columbia whom the District enrolled in the three summers in Portland, Oregon programme at its expense. His best qualification was his uncle, a member of the School Board. Since Langley was not going to be my home, in the spring break of 1965, I got a job in Revelstoke School District, in the heart of the Canadian Rockies, on the Columbia River, one of the ski havens. I had learned to ski on the slopes of Mt. Baker in 1961 while going to school there. Besides I was getting married on Christmas day 1965.

### 1965-1966 School District #19 (Revelstoke) British Columbia.

British Columbia and Washington State shared a joint International Lions District. The Secretary General of the District started pushing me to open a **Lions club** there that they had been desperately

trying to establish for many years. I did and became its **Charter President**. But I did not give up my search for a position that was eluding me because it was classified as an Administrative position, thus coveted.

Spring break 1966 again saw me at teacher hiring gathering of the School Superintendents. **Squamish School Board** was advertising just such a position. The Superintendent greeted me warmly, read my resume and complimented me profusely but added that for my own sake he would not offer me the job of Audio-visual director of his District. Asked why, his answer was shocking.

Because I was such a highly educated person I would not like to live in Squamish because my countrymen (Panjabis) who work in the local saw mills were illiterate persons. I had never heard such an absurd racist comment. I do not recall what I said to him exactly but it was neither rude nor complimentary; **sarcastic may be!**

### **1966 August-December 1967 School District # 85 (Port Hardy) British Columbia.**

I walked out of his room and went in for the only other position that I desired. Squamish was on the mainland, 40 miles north of Vancouver. That is why it became my first preference. The other job was on the North end of Vancouver Island, without any paved roads, mostly gravel covered trucking roads for lumber trucks. There were five School Districts in five small communities, all of them were administered by the Superintendent from Courtney/ Campbell River area. He had advertised for two positions, one **District Librarian** and one **Adult Education Director**. Five small communities were: **Port Hardy**, a fishing village; **Port McNeill**, Lumber Company headquarters; **Alert Bay**, native Indian fishing village on a small island across from Port McNeill; **Port Alice**, a Pulp Mill town on the west coast of the Island; and **Holberg**, an Air Force Base.

Knowing that all those communities were not only small and not even easily accessible, if they hire two people, it will stretch their budgets. I could do both jobs and that is what I proposed to the Superintendent. He liked the idea and promised to call me once he had discussed this with five School Boards. **I had created a job for myself, starting in August 1966.**

Within first few months I **Chartered five Lions Clubs in these five communities and was elected Charter President of Port Hardy Lions Club**, where my office was located.

That year's budget was already prepared. When I proposed my budget for the following year an ethical dilemma arose. I was not getting the minimum funds I needed to do my job. **My budget was less than my salary.** Should I stay and be unhappy or resign effective December 1967. For the school teachers of British Columbia there were only two dates in the year when they could resign, June 30<sup>th</sup> or Dec 31. After serious consideration I came to the conclusion that perhaps the School Districts' were premature in wanting the services for which they had no budget. I chose to resign effective December 31<sup>st</sup> 1967.

### **1968 January-May 30, 1968 Substitute Teacher School District #39 (Vancouver)**

By now I was confident that I will line up a job starting in **September 1968**. My wife and I will have almost eight months to fulfill my dream travel: fly to Germany, pick up a Volkswagen

Camper, drive to India via a route different from I took in 1960, head back retracting my 1960 route before heat wave envelops India. Vancouver School Board was the largest system in British Columbia. I went to see the Superintendent. **I laid out my plans to use the resources of School buildings, libraries and human resources for adults during after school hours. He was intrigued.** There was only one progressive Head Master he knew. He set up an appointment for us to meet. He also gave me a rather unpleasant news. Every summer officers of the School Boards used to fly to England to fill up teaching positions starting in September of that year. This year they flew to Australia, where school year ends on December 31<sup>st</sup> and brought back a chartered plane load of teachers. That meant that I will have to wait until Easter to line up a September job and that will jettison my planned trip.

Meeting with the Principal went very well. We both had the same ideas and his Librarian who had no interest in something like I was proposing, was retiring that June, with one proviso; the teacher-school board contract provided her with the option to delay her retirement by one year and she had until June 1<sup>st</sup> to decide. Superintendent had one solution for me. They had a brand-new School, designed for a new method of teaching called **team teaching** with large classes. The Social Studies teacher was on an extended sick leave; I could take his place as a substitute teacher. I welcomed that offer but the days started sliding by and Easter break came. Then a new idea came into my mind. Ontario was one province where Geography was taught as a separate discipline, not social studies, which was history with a different name. They did their hiring during Easter break as well. I applied for one position just north of Toronto city limits.

A clerk from the Principal's office came to my classroom to say that there is an important phone call for me in the Principal's office. It was the Superintendent in Ontario offering me the job, without an interview. I accepted. As soon as I walked into my house my wife told me there was a call for me from the Superintendent of the Vancouver School Board. Time was past 5:00pm. Next morning the Superintendent told me that the School Librarian had opted to retire and that the job that I desired was mine. I broke the news to him that I am sorry, I had already accepted a job in Ontario, yesterday. I should mention here that one of the good things for the students of British Columbia is the practice that a verbal offer and verbal acceptance of a job between the Superintendent and the teacher is as good as a written one. I could have chosen to call the Superintendent in Ontario to release me from the verbal contract but he went through a great deal of effort. He called my home first; my wife told him I was teaching in one of Vancouver's Schools; he called the Vancouver School Board to find out which school and then he persuaded the Principal of that school to call me to the phone for an important phone call. **My conscience would not allow it although it will prove to be life altering experience for me.**

**If I had accepted my 'dream job' in Vancouver I would never have a run in with George Wootten six years later and won't be sitting in the sunshine state of California, at an elevation of 1000 feet with 180-degree 100-mile view, looking down at the capital of the world's fifth-largest economy, bigger than Britain, Sacramento, California 30 miles away, 30 feet above sea level, provided, of course the air is not full of smoke from the forest fires, as is lately happening. I would have missed the challenging experiences and retired as a Librarian from Vancouver School Board. There would never have been a Sikh Bulletin. I should be thanking George Wootten for his contribution towards my rich and rewarding life and person I have become.**

**It is up to the individual to turn adversity into opportunity provided your actions are based on certain fundamental principles of life. My advice to everyone who reads this is to give the best of yourself to any task in life that you choose, without fear, and go around the obstacles to the next higher plane.**

**1968-1970 York County Board of Education, Aurora, Ontario.**

The trip that I had planned was in shambles. Cooler season for drive to India was gone. If I could line up a September job now, I will fly, solo, around the world for three or four months, arriving back in Vancouver a week before schools started. That is what transpired; I flew east and returned from the west, spending almost a month in India, Kashmir and Nepal, visiting family after eight years. All our possessions fitted into the smallest U Haul that we hauled, non-stop almost, to Toronto.

**1970-1971 Head, Geography Department, Kent County Board of Education, Chatham Ontario.**

My posting was in an old small agricultural town, **Ridgetown**, where almost every one living there was born there. People were friendly. The Geography teacher I was replacing had a house there which I ended up buying. Revived the OTC programme at the school and received the rank of **2nd Lieutenant in the Canadian Armed Forces.** 1971 Easter break brought the news for the position of a Geography Professor at Douglas College in New Westminister, B. C. that had commenced classes in 1970 but I knew nothing about. This was an opportunity to get back to British Columbia.

Drove to Toronto to be interviewed by the Dean and got the job. Rules were first year probation and then three-year contracts. The house that I had bought came with a Maple tree that we tapped in the spring for home-made maple syrup. But I would strongly advise against that practice; it takes too long to get the final product.

**1971-1972 Douglas College, New Westminister, British Columbia.**

New Westminister was my wife's home town. Her parents had a hundred-year-old house less than half a mile from the temporary location of Douglas College, in portable class rooms, from the house. Her parents had purchased a water front lot on one of the Gulf Islands in the Strait of Georgia, between Vancouver Island and the mainland of British Columbia, Canada, and were building their house themselves. I bought their New Westminister house thinking that I was finally home, teaching the subject I love and beautiful sight of Mt. Baker across the border, where I learnt to Ski, from the house, where I could one day build a multistory house with a Pent House Suite.

**1972-1975 As per College policy Three Year contract issued.**

**1972 Elected President of the Douglas College Faculty Association and delegate to the College Faculties Federation.**

**In 1972, I received my three-year contact.** Appointed during the first year by the Principal of the College, George Wootten, outgoing President of the Douglas College Faculty Association,

proposed my name for next year's presidentship and I got elected by acclamation. Reason for this became clear the same evening when the Past President invited me for Dinner with the College President, where 'collegiality' was preached, and next time at my very first meeting with the College Faculties Federation. George Wootten did not want CFF to succeed and that was the reason why only a small fraction of Douglas College Faculty belonged to the association, Things changed quickly. Membership increased. **By arranging to have me nominated for Presidentship, George Wootten made a big mistake, both for himself and for me.** There was no reason for him to panic but panic he did. He put all kinds of pressure on me through my three colleagues who were hired during the first year of college.

### **1973 November appointed to the Task Force on the Community College as representative of College teaching faculties.**

Newly elected government of the Province had promised access to two-year colleges for all the people of British Columbia. To that effect the Minister of Education appointed an English Educator to develop a course of action. He appointed the Task Force on the Community College, staffed by representatives chosen by him out of two nominated by various interest groups within the province. Out of the two nominations from the College Faculties Federation he chose me. All the hell broke loose. George Wootten panicked. He was not chosen for the Task Force from the names proposed by the Principals. He was losing control.

He immediately set upon to harass me by using or abusing my three colleagues from the very first year of college. Poor characters, they obliged by scheduling my classes from first thing in the morning to the last on the opposite side of a large jurisdiction where classes were held, leaving no time for me to attend the Task Force meetings.

### **I have never in my life given up easily.**

The Chairperson of the Task Force was a lady member of the Douglas College Council and also a good friend of the lady Minister of Education. I took my concerns to her. She spoke to The Minister who instructed the Director of the Task Force to see to it that I am allowed time to attend the Task Force meetings by providing a substitute teacher. A lot of activity happened out of sight and details were not known to me then. I learned of all that in the local newspaper article of May 8, 1974, **"DOES STAR CHAMBER EXIST AT DOUGLAS COLLEGE?"** To this day I do not know who initiated this exhaustive coverage of this incident and why.

### **1974, January 24 remaining of three-year contract bought out.**

January 31<sup>st</sup> 1974 was the last day for the current College Council that had practically given George Wootten dictatorial powers to operate the college. Coming from industry background he wanted to run the college as a CEO. Council had been compliant with whatever he did. Before the Council changed, he wanted me out of the way and the only way for that, against which I had no recourse, was to buy out my contract as is the practice in the industry. **My entire effort was directed at getting rights written into law for the protection of the teaching faculty, among other things. George and I had irreconcilable differences**

**1974 February appointed full time to the Task Force on the Community College by the Minister of Education.**

**By buying my contract George wanted to kill two birds with one stone. Get me out of his hair forever and see me thrown out of The Task Force. Unfortunately for him neither happened. I got appointed full time to The Task Force that led me to start a brand-new college and sit across the table from George in Principals' meetings.**

**1975 January Appointed College Development Consultant by the Minister of Education to prepare a report for viability of a college to serve North Vancouver Island.**

This was my territory in 1966 and 1967 when I served as **District Librarian and Adult Education Director** for the five School Districts and **chartered five Lions Clubs**. That played a very large role for the Minister to assign me for this task.

**1975 March Report to establish North Island College submitted to the Minister of Education.**

In depth effort to start the college began in earnest by hiring a college Bursar, teaching staff and starting classes, including an arrangement with University of Edmonton, Alberta in the field of Adult Education.

**1975 July-March 31, 1976 North Island College, Campbell River, Administrative Director.**

I was assigned to this job by the Minister of Education. Now the College Council, representatives of the participating school boards, was in charge. They advertised position of the Principal. I too applied but the job went to an Englishman who had migrated to Canada same year I did, 1962, taught for one year in Saskatchewan and moved south across the border. At the time of applying for this job he was working as administrative assistant to the Principal of the Community College in Vancouver, Washington State.

He was gracious enough to ask me to stay on but I had other ventures to explore, may be in non-educational field. In two years working non-stop and after giving fourteen years of my life to Canada's education system, I had achieved the highest position I could. This was enough. I had three months paid vacation coming. That cheque went towards buying four tickets for my family to visit India, first time for them, for three months.

**1976 Move to California and new life.**

Upon return in April 1976 I proceeded with my effort to relocate in California where I chose to live near Sacramento. I obtained Teaching and Administrative Credentials for employment in California's Community Colleges, the system on which our Task Force recommendations were based, but never did try for a job. I settled in my own Real Estate business where I still am and living in the same house since 1982, longest ever and hopefully last stay in my life.

## Glorious Sunsets from the House



When I was a child living in 35BB in Ganganagar District of Bikaner State, we used to experience almost daily sand storms during dry summer months before the rains came and they changed colour as time lapsed from frightening dark black wall of sand coming at you through various shades to milky white due to suspended small dust particles in the air, that one could look at the sun directly.

**I let child's imagination run wild, imagining that the colourful dust came from East Africa where my mother's cousins were living and wished I could too.**

I often dreamed of seeing the wide world beyond the confines of annual train travel from 35BB to Sakruli. In 1949 when I was in first year college at Mahalpur, one of my mother's cousins was visiting India. I begged him to take me with him. I did not know the intricacies of foreign travel.

**In my almost 85 years of life I have learned a lot and have lived through lot. Having given up on all the religions before my teenage years and never visiting the Gurdwaras when I was young, I have run a gurdwara at my expense for nine years with the purpose of reforming Sikhi; spent eight years wondering why Sikhism cannot be reformed; finding out the fundamental truth that no religion has ever been reformed; basically because religion, like God, is creation of humans and human nature is to err; and published the Sikh Bulletin for twenty years. There was a course correction for the Sikh Bulletin in 2013 when I discovered Guru Nanak and saw the LIGHT. Click the link below to see what I have learned about Nanak.**

<https://sikhbulletin.com/Files/NanakMyDiscovery.pdf>

**Going through college and reading magazines and books I developed fascination with the United States of America and admiration for President Lincoln who went to war to preserve the Union and I dreamed.**

The country seemed to be unique, very different from every other country. It was home to people with many nationalities. It accepted people from various countries of Europe where minorities with different religious beliefs were persecuted. Africans were the integral part of the fabric of the society although they had to struggle harder than Europeans to get their rights. Indian scholars were also going there on various scholarship programs. And of course, there was large presence of Hispanics, United State having annexed by force their territories from Texas to California just because it could.

When I received immigration into Canada, I did run into discrimination but at the same time I ran into some of the best people. There is more discrimination in India based on the caste system among the people who are otherwise the same.

**By 2013 I was beginning to understand Guru Nanak's (April 15, 1469 -September 22, 1539) philosophy but not as a basis for yet another divisive religion but rather the philosophy of living by all mankind, living in harmony with nature and with each other, on this small blue dot, without any religious sermonizing and fear of fictitious God.**

**To Qazi Ruknuddin's question in Mecca, "Fala Allah mazabo"? (What is your religion?), Guru Nanak's response was "Abdulla Allah la mazaboo" (I am a man of 'God' and belong to no religion).**

**The strongest evidence of Guru Nanak's aversion towards religion is found on P. 1136 of AGGS.**

ਨਾ ਹਮ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਨ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ ॥ Nā am Hindū nā Musalmān.

We are neither Hindus, nor Muslims. AGGS M5, p 1136

**Fifth Guru, Guru Arjan, does not say we are Sikhs.**

Nor did Guru Nanak believe in GOD as other religions do and in this he was not alone. However, Guru Nanak was not the first person to reject religion as an institution. **Aristotle 384-322 BC: rejected man-made religions and their Gods.**

**“According to the book of Genesis, God created man in his own image, but according to Aristotle, men create gods after their own image.”**

**I regret not finding the truth about Guru Nanak's philosophy, buried under gobbledygook in the gurdwaras, when I was a lot younger. It is imperative that our younger generation, living in multiple countries and distinct societies, be made aware of Guru Nanak's philosophy so that they become healthy members of those societies.**

**I started looking at Canada and the United States as societies where Guru Nanak's concept of society could be accomplished and I have every hope that eventually it will be so.**

**Canada is still on track. In 1962 John Diefenbaker, the then Prime Minister of Canada let me in on the basis of what I could contribute to its growth and development. In 1972 Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, the father of the current Prime Minister of Canada, opened Canada's doors for Panjabi and other Asian refugees evicted by Idi Ameen, dictator of Uganda, where they had lived for generations. He gave them 90 days to leave the country. In 2018 Justin Trudeau, Canada's current Prime Minister, followed in his father's footsteps by offering new home to Syrian refugees that United States created.**

**But United States has run into a temporary hitch. 61% of the population in the United States is white and all white Evangelicals, who call themselves Christians, voted for Trump, including the women in spite of what he thinks of them. People like that calling themselves Christians should be of concern to all Christians, if there are any true Christians.**

**Climate for Trump's rise was created by eight years of Obama Presidency and the climate for Trump like presidency was created by the extreme right wing of the Republican Party, encouraged by the disgraceful Senate Majority Leader, Mitchell McConnell, who tacitly remained silent when Trump trumpeted the false rumor that Obama was not born in the USA. He doubled down to pledge that he will make Obama one term President, in which he failed. The whole Republican Party, Lincoln's Party, appealed to the baser instincts of White Christians. Now we have a congenital liar, spitting lies day and night, unashamedly, a misogynist, Narcissistic Sociopath, a crazy clown for a President with zero civic sense.**

**Trump was not elected President by the people who did vote but by the people who did not vote. Out of total **231,556,622 eligible voters** only **138,884,643** (57.9%) actually voted. Of these**

65,844,954 (48.2%) voted for **Hillary** and 62,979,879 (46.1) for **Trump**. **The real electors of Trump were the 42.1% who did not vote** in this crucial election; **Shame on them**. The reason Trump won with fewer votes goes back to the time when North, mostly Republican, defeated the slave owning South, mostly Democrat, in their Civil War and gave the vanquished South unfair advantage in electing the President through the practice called **Electoral College**.

**Political parties in my adopted country have reversed roles since I first studied them in 1950's. Slave owning Democrats of the previous century have become Republicans in their policy and Republicans of today have donned the garb of previous slave owners. The GOP is now the party of neo-Confederates. They have been emboldened to come into open by Trump's appeals to racism and xenophobia. Even in matters of Tariffs, in 2018 the two parties have reversed positions, Democrats who used to be for Tariffs when I was going through college are now against them and Republicans have not raised hue and cry against their President who brags himself as Tariffs President.**

**Now I have come to the 4<sup>th</sup> stage in my life that I read about in my 5<sup>th</sup> grade**, the first time I had access to **Hindu Granths** in my Middle School library. I have already gone through my childhood, **the first stage**; life as a householder, **the second stage**; having done my duty towards my children, my younger siblings and other dependents, I think I have done something for the community I was born into, **the third stage**. This is the **fourth stage** where finally I have to meet my maker.

**Guru Nanak (1469-1539), a Panjabi Philosopher**, (I do not wish to call him Indian because India rejected him. Jawaher Lal Nehru, in his book "Discovery of India", Guru Nanak, just the name only, is mentioned only once, on page 240 alongside Amir Khusrau in the heading: "The Indian Social Structure: Importance of the Group". Not a single other word is used about Guru Nanak or his contribution to India's Social Structure.) **makes it easy for me to understand what to expect in this stage of life, become immortal by merging with the Creator. There is no second coming, no matter what the man-made religions claim.**

ਦੇਹੀ ਮਾਟੀ ਬੋਲੈ ਪਉਣੁ॥ ਬੁਝੁ ਰੇ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਮੁਆ ਹੈ ਕਉਣੁ॥  
ਮੁਈ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਬਾਦੁ ਅਹੰਕਾਰੁ॥ ਓਹ ਨ ਮੁਆ ਜੋ ਦੇਖਣਾਰੁ॥

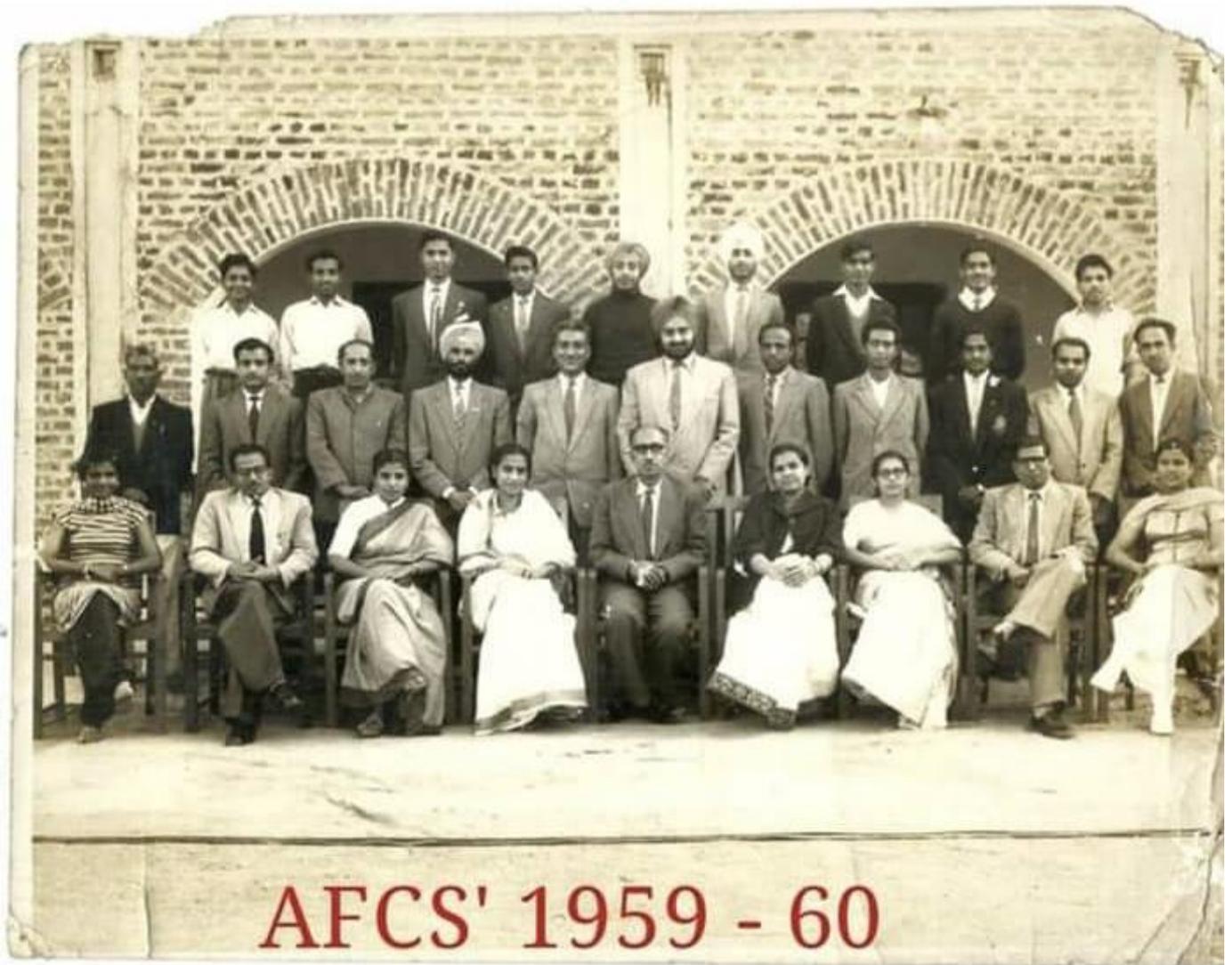
*"The body is made of earth (various elements) and it is the air (breath) that keeps it alive. O wise one, then tell me who died because the body and the air it breathed are still here? It is consciousness that died along with disputes caused by egotistical pride, but the One (Creator) who takes care of all does not die."* AGGS, M 1, p. 152.

Hardev Singh Shergill  
December 21, 2018

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**Sikh Family in Diaspora**: Story of ten siblings who left their ancestral home in Rajasthan, India, founded by their grandparents, for better opportunity in North America but converted their ancestral home into a free pre-natal and post-natal clinic for needy families, in memory of their mother who died for lack of post-natal care five months after the birth of our tenth sibling. He is the one who took the initiative to keep the memory of our mother he never knew and grandmother who raised him from the age of five months to a handsome young man of thirteen.

<https://sikhbulletin.com/Bulletins/SikhBulletinJulAug2012.pdf>



Air Force Central School, New Delhi, a few weeks before my journey.  
In this Staff Picture I am 4<sup>th</sup> from the left in the second row.  
Photo Courtesy, Parminder Dhillon, my student, who now lives in North Carolina State.



1956-1957

One glorious year studying for B. Ed and spending weekends hiking around with friends in nature's bounty conferred on Dharamshala, now the seat of Dalai Lama.



Dharamshala environs  
Those Primus stove cooked meals,  
everything in one pot,  
were delicious.



1954 MA Geography Class on Field Trip in Gulmarg, Kashmir.

I am standing, tasting and seeing my first snow.

Seven years later I would learn to Ski on it on the other side of the globe on slopes of Mt. Baker, WA



Task Force on the Community College in British Columbia, Canada August 1974

Front Row from the left, Dev Shergill; Len O'Neill; John Bremer, Commissioner of Education; Honourable Eileen Dailly, Minister of Education; Hazel L'Estrange, Chairman, is extreme right of the front row.