



Left: The Randhawa family at a demonstration advocating for child-care support in Whitehorse, fall 1993.
Right: Harbans Singh with grandchildren Arjun and Asher in Vancouver, July 2021.

JASBIR RANDHAWA AND HARBANS SINGH

Social justice advocates

By Hidden Histories Society Yukon

While other kids were playing with friends on the weekend, Jasmina Randhawa and her two siblings were often at a picket line alongside their parents, Jasbir Randhawa and Harbans (Har) Singh. "It wasn't considered something special or unique; it was just kind of something that you did," said Jasmina about supporting social-justice initiatives.

Jasbir and Har left the territory years ago, but their legacy lives on—Jasbir for working to improve early childhood education; Har for fighting to improve workers' rights. And their reach extended beyond the causes closest to them. When CBC workers were on strike, Jasmina recalls, "My mom cooked up a bunch of Indian food and took it out there and served lunch to everybody."

Har and Jasbir were born in India's Punjab state. Har trained as a heavy-duty and aircraft mechanic, emigrating to Canada in 1968. He worked at mines across the country and eventually landed at Cyprus Anvil Mining Corporation, in Faro. Jasbir completed a master's degree in Punjabi linguistics and worked for the Punjab department of agriculture before joining Har in Canada, in 1981. Jasbir shared her husband's enthusiasm for the beauty of the Yukon, saying, "It looks like God lives here."

The territory's South Asian community was small but close-knit. "When my dad first went to Faro, there were only a handful of ... Indian people," said Jasmina.

"They became family." She said this helped bridge the distance from home. "We could still understand our culture and heritage and be around other people who understood that, but also be a part of the broader community here."

Har and Jasbir moved to Whitehorse with their daughter Grace when the Faro Mine closed. They had two more daughters, Jessica and Jasmina. Har worked as a mechanic for the Yukon government and Jasbir studied early childhood education and opened her own day home. She became president of the Yukon Child Care Association and advocated for better child-care standards, funding, and training and equitable wages for workers.

Har filed a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission, in 1987, alleging the Yukon government denied him three job promotions because of his race. The tribunal ruled in his favour, in 1994. As a union steward and executive member, Har advocated for improved workplace air quality and for government employees to be covered under the *Workers' Compensation Act*.

As the territory's South Asian community grows, Jasmina, who lives in Whitehorse, said it's important to recognize past generations. "It's good for all of us to know the history of what's come before us and the work that other people put in and the contributions that they had and how they helped us get to where we are." **Y**

Hidden Histories Society Yukon researches the stories of Black and Asian people who have contributed to the economic, cultural, and social development of the territory.