

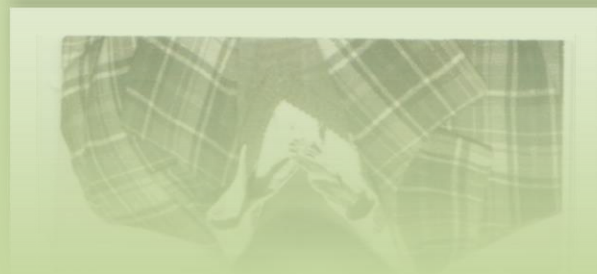
# Daddy's Shoes

## A First Person Narrative of the Immigration Experiences of Gurchet Singh Kandola

By: Manisha Kandola

ASIA 475

Final Project



“...If you have a kid, you should take responsibility until they’re 18 or 20. And that’s the only thing I’ll say to every person, if you take responsibility to have kids you should stay with them, and take care of them until they’re 18 or 20.” – Interviewee, Gurchet Singh Kandola

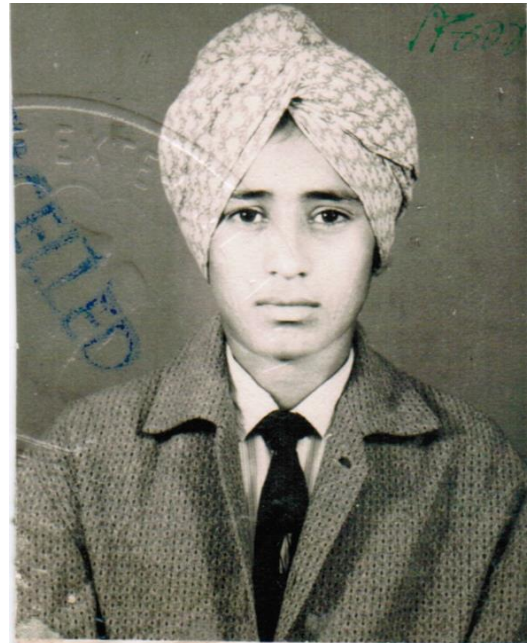
## Note about the Author

When Manisha Kandola was two; she was addicted to eating ketchup packets. One day in an attempt to hide the ketchup packets from her parents, she placed them inside of her father's black, leather, boots. Her father unknowingly put on the boots the next day, and when he stood up to take a step, each packet burst. The insides of the boots transformed into a sticky blood red: the shoes had to be thrown out. As a result of this story, the title of this piece is called, "Daddy's Shoes". Additionally, however, the title also stands for the metaphor in which the author has placed herself into the "shoes of her father" in order to understand his perspective.

1970

Excitement rises with heat  
We are almost at the airport  
They kiss me goodbye  
I wait; ascend the stairs to the plane  
Two suns rise while two moons fall  
India. Japan. Canada  
Vancouver awaits with open arms and  
Welcomes me with snow, similar to  
Warm buffalo milk at home

Excitement cools. Sinks,  
realization prevails  
One way ticket on a visitor visa which  
transforms itself into a student. And  
a return ticket costs as much as  
down payments  
I'm only fourteen.



A warm moist hand held mine before pulling me in close to her chest. My mother looked at me, with glazed eyes and trembling lips. My grandfather loosened her grip, grabbed my arm, and dragged me towards the moonlit road ahead. Behind us stood the silhouettes of my mother and aunt, which I would probably not see again, as we ventured off towards unfamiliarity.

I sat on a chartered bus with my two grandfathers, while one narrated his own travel experiences from fighting with the British in WWI. The dark portraits of Punjab sputtered past the window as dawn grew into morning and the purple-blue sky transformed into candlelight orange; sun almost visible. The pickled mango stuck between my teeth melted away, but hunger did not surge; my body craved adventure.

Upon arrival, my baba ji looked at me and said,

"Remember, your intentions in Canada are just to visit. When you stop over in Tokyo, just follow everyone else. The telegram has already been sent to your older cousin."

“Wait,” I replied, eyes open wide, “you guys aren’t coming with me?”

I looked at the Delhi International airport behind me, and back at my two grandfathers, who stood in front of the bus, return tickets in hand. Each grandfather took me in his arms and then patted me roughly as if their hands were telling my body to be strong. Before turning away, one of my grandfathers, reached into his right coat pocket and pulled out 8 dollars. This exchange of money became the only advice given to me, from my grandfather that I could take with me on my journey. Apart from that, there were no manuals or directions explaining how to get from the bus to the plane, or from India to the foreign land.



### **Port Alberni**

Standing up against the frosted window  
Nose pushed up against the glass.  
Glistening flakes fall from the sky  
clumping together on the grass.  
White flakes flutter from the sky  
falling lightly like dust picked up from  
light winds on the farm  
back home.  
They call it snow and  
It reaches my knees  
It’s cold, soft, and covers all trees.

### **1971**

I sat amongst my classmates, dressed in the same shirt and pants as everyone else. We all bought our outfits from Woodward’s down the street, therefore we all looked uniform without coordination. The only differences amongst our outfits were the girls and teachers who wore skirts and dresses. With shorn hair and a jelly sandwich in my knapsack, I sat, shoulders back, head straight, in the back of the classroom. My palms became increasingly clammy.

“Thud!” Pencil tip breaking upon impact with the beige, glossy, floor: Another failed attempt to get the other students from stripping me with their gazes.

“This is a white man’s country,” written on the walls of this grade 8 classroom in invisible ink.

“Go back to your country you Hindu,” whispered the blond-haired, boy beside me.

My lungs pushed out more air than I exhaled. They taunted me thinking that I chose to be here. That somehow I had sent myself to Canada, but the memory of my parents flickered in my mind because unlike my classmates, I wouldn’t be able to go home to mine.

**1972**

In Punjab: Farming  
Is a household chore  
But farming in Punjab  
Is different from Vancouver  
Technology. Language. Skill set.  
With no high school diploma  
Determination ultimately prevails  
when the basement is lonely  
and filled solely, with  
a 16 year old.  
My own rent. My own rules  
Sixteen. Sixteen. Alone.

**1973**

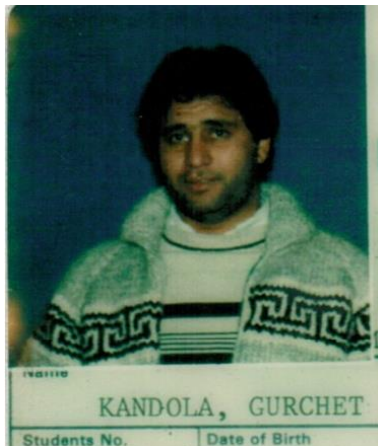
Arctic Draft  
Bare eyes  
Gloves, suspenders, steel toed boots  
Newly instituted safety regulations  
Biceps, triceps, carved to perfection  
A perfection needed to assemble the  
steel necessary for this railway  
In box cars, we  
Travel. Eat. Sleep  
A beer in Field,  
A rest stop in Cranbrook  
From B.C. we travel as far as  
Saskatchewan

**1974**

Blue metal intersected by  
new grills, new tailgates  
Laguna luxury, 1800 dollars  
Superior road manners  
GR70-15 radial-ply tires  
A vinyl roof. Opera-type vertical  
rear windows. Four spoke  
steering wheel with firmer  
shocks and springs  
Swivel bucket seats. 145  
Horsepower; thunderous muffler  
Clutch. Break. Gas  
Chevrolet Chevelle

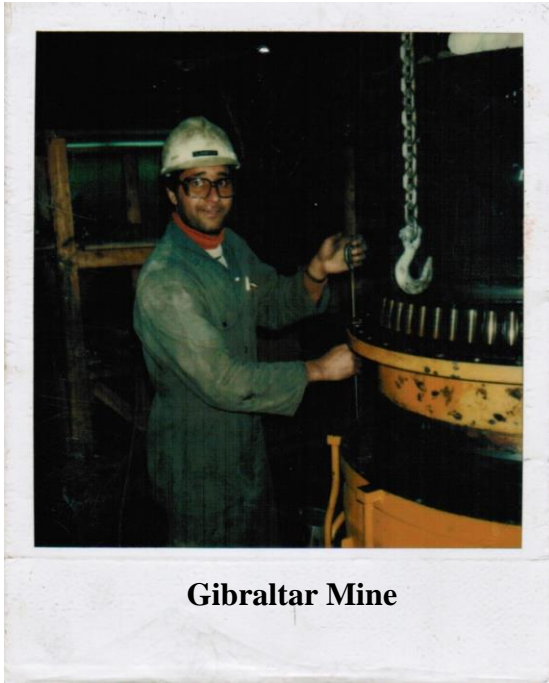


**1977**



### **Master Mechanic**

For 12 months, I went to class at 9 AM, got off at 4 PM, slept and ate, and then worked the night shift. For 12 months, I took classes to improve my English, studied at the Vancouver Vocational Institute for my Electronics Technician Diploma, and then worked graveyard shifts from 10:30 PM till 7 AM. The following year, after graduating, I took a nine-month auto-mechanic course at the Pacific Vocational Institute, and only then did I quit my job to focus on school. All of this in an attempt to break free from minimum wage jobs.



**Gibraltar Mine**

**1979**

“Ring, ring, ring” chimed the phone.

“Hello” I said.

“Hey paji, come with us to Williams Lake. We need you for our Kabaddi tournament” replied my friend from the other end of the line.

I looked at the calendar posted on the wall and then back towards the telephone.

“Sure” I said, “I guess I can come.”

**Williams Lake: Electrician Apprenticeship**

“Hey Gurch- umm, Gordi, can you come here please?” Asked my new employer.

I moved without hesitation; sacrificing my Punjabi name meant further adaptation.

On Monday morning, upon clocking in, and grabbing my work gear, I walked into the locker room. My Metis coworker stood in front of his locker.

“You know Gordi” he said, “I’ve noticed how the other workers” he paused, “they don’t pick on you too much.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Well I’ve seen them other workers pick on the Chinese and the Japanese guys, but they, they don’t say anything to you,” he said.

Silence enveloped the room while we finished putting on our work gear.

“Look” I said, “some people here like to think that because of their colour, they’re better than us, but I don’t take it too negative, I don’t put myself down.” My eyes scanned the room, the blue lockers, and then the benches.

“You see,” I said, “I challenge them up to the point where they don’t want to say anything to me. That’s what you’ve got to do: Prove to them that you’re capable of doing your job.” I closed my locker and walked out of the room.

In the large technician room I found my boss delegating tasks to four of my coworkers. They were standing around a crane and beside them lay a bolt, screw, and a large metal block. The block weighed roughly a hundred pounds and my employer decided that a crane was necessary in positioning the block while two other employees screwed it into place.

“Ah, Gordi, you’ve arrived” said my boss. He looked at me and then back towards the others. “Guys, our human crane is here!” He exclaimed.



I laid down on to my back and had two of my coworkers hand me the large metal piece. I grabbed it with two hands and then slid myself beneath the broken machine. In a bench press position, I pushed up the metal and secured it into place.

“Alright guys, pass me the bolt and screw,” I said. With the metal pushed up against the machine with my left hand, and screw in my right, I twisted the screw until it locked into place. I then carefully slid out from beneath the machine.

“Hey boss” I said, “we’re done, no crane needed!”

Later that afternoon, my Metis coworker sat down next to me during our break.

“You know Gordi, they’re not keeping you here for your skin colour, they’re keeping you here for your work,” he said.



### 1982

December '82

Sitting in the matchmaker's living room, I see her for the first time

Our eyes meet for a mere second before hers fall towards my sweater and then upwards. I hope she likes curls, and my muscles, which aren't that visible. I hope I don't look fat under my thick sweater.

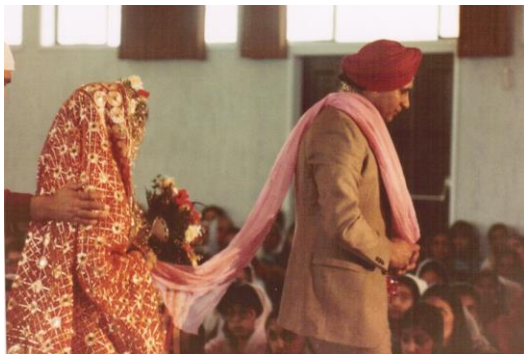
Breathe. Sweaty palms, warmth accumulating beneath my sweater. I think she passes; I think she's suitable to marry.

### Wedding Date

“Hello Gurchet” read the letter, “I’m in India now to buy my wedding outfit. And in case you haven't already heard, our date has been set for this year. See you soon!”



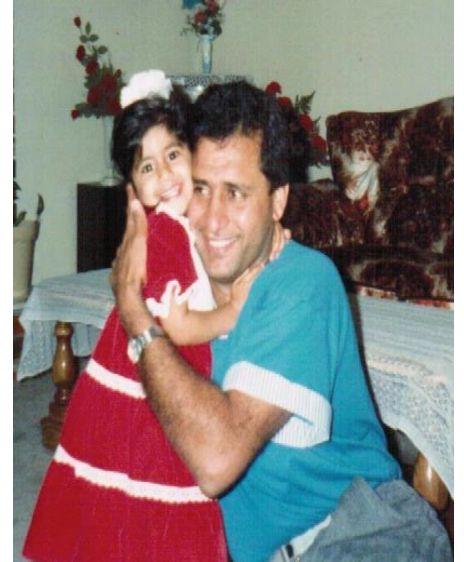
**Sukh Sagar Gurdwara,  
New Westminster**





### Williams Lake Circa 1980s

Dry eyes, aching belly.  
Her belly swollen with our first child.  
Six months pass and a child lays  
Within my arms. A child, I thought  
Not just a child, but a  
Responsibility  
To hold, grow, and nurture  
To protect during stormy nights  
And run around with beneath the sun  
To discipline, but love  
This is my child.



### 1987

A signal is sent from my brain.  
It travels through treacherous terrain,  
Interactions. Hip. Hamstring. Calf.

The brain has sent a signal to my foot, and  
instantaneously, as if nothing had been  
Sent. Received  
the ball flies from beneath my foot  
Directly into the net.



It was the championship game, and our team had made it easily into the finals. 90 minutes passed, but the winner could not be named, for the game ended with the score tied at 2 for each side. Even after overtime play, we still remained tied and went in for penalty kicks. As usual, I was set to kick last.

The first kicker from the opposing team placed the ball on the grass, took 3 steps backwards, and then charged for the ball. The ball missed the net. The second kicker from the same team charged towards the ball, defeated our goalkeeper, and scored a goal. Fortunately, however, the three kickers that followed were unable to score additional goals. With five penalty kicks completed by the other team, it was our turn.

My teammate carefully set up the ball, he checked for the direction of the wind, and took a deep breath. His kick had been carefully planned out, and this became evident when he scored. My second teammate, jogged out to the field with excitement glowing in his eyes. But his set up lacked patience, and as a result, he missed the net. My two teammates that followed were both unsuccessful and the game remained tied.

“Hah! We gonna win now! We gonna win now!” Exclaimed one of my teammates from the sideline. “I’ve never seen him miss: Paji never misses!” He said.

I hadn’t even taken my turn yet, but my teammate was right. I had never missed a penalty kick!



### 1988

“Honey,” she said, “Lets move to Vancouver.”

I thought about my house. I built this house, and then images of my friends passed through my mind; they had done so much for us, how could we just leave.

“Why do you want to leave Williams Lake?” I asked.

Her shoulders dropped, her head down, eyes fixed on to the carpet.

“First, we have no family out here, second, this town dies when your mine goes on strike, and third, I want to go back to school,” she said.

### 1992

I watched my wife walk across the stage towards her nursing diploma. She accepted it gracefully.

“I can have a secure job too now,” She said.

### 1994

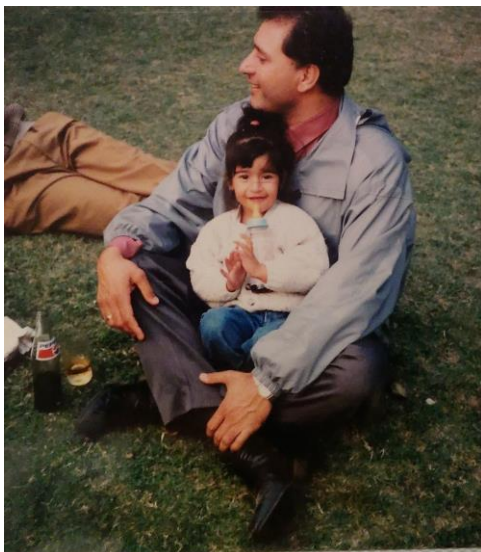
The noses of two children were pushed up against the front room windows, causing the glass to fog up. The front door swung open as my wife, and I carried our newborn child up the driveway.

“She’s so cute,” said my daughter.

“Let me hold her!” Exclaimed my son.

“Be gentle,” said my wife, carefully removing our baby from the blanket and placing her into the arms of our daughter.

“Her name is Manisha,” I said, smiling.





## 2015

And here I sit, mesmerized by the production quality of the sports channel on this flat screened television. Beer can in my left hand, remote control in my right as the motion pictures pass ever so smoothly before my eyes. Times like these are the best to reminisce.

It's amazing how my children have grown. Memories of my son's soccer games flash through my mind. He did well in sports; while we received many phone calls notifying us of my elder daughter's academic achievements. I miss taking them to practices, but my younger daughter has replaced them. In the evening I'll put on my sneakers and my daughter and I will head out to the field, to go practice. This room is filled with trophies, medals, and certificates. Framed newspapers hang on the wall adjacent to the T.V.: My children have made me proud.

Eyelids become heavy and drop, but I let them. These days, waking up on the couch at 6am has hints of success hidden within it. I don't have to get up and rush to the bathroom in hopes of leaving the house before traffic starts. Now I can stare at the ceiling, for a few minutes, or make breakfast for my wife before she leaves for work. Coffee in hand, I can watch the sports highlights before leaving the house and visiting my wife at work, or dropping my daughter off at the sky train station because she's running late for school.

### Glossary

Baba Ji	Grandfather
Gurdwara	Sikh Temple
Kabaddi	A contact sport that originated in India
Paji	Brother

November 2015: Quotes from the Interview with Gurchet Singh Kandola



“You feel happy. You say hey I have somebody to look after now. Same for second and third one... You have to wait for them to come home, shower, and eat. Then you have to wake them up and say ‘get up, get up’ they don’t want to listen.”



“Each time the jobs went down we came up better. When I was on strike... then I finished the basement in the Williams Lake house.”

“I’m not retired you have to change that”

“Okay but why did you quit your nine to five job in June?”

“That was the day that suited me most... because the 2010 World Cup was starting.”



“I thought some time that I should have become a teacher or a PE teacher. I could have made a lot of kid’s lives different; I get along pretty good with kids. I could have had a lot of kids fit. I want kids to do well”



“Are you satisfied?”  
 “I am... If we had two other houses it wouldn’t have made any difference, people look at your personality not your houses... Plus I’m happy, that your brother isn’t borrowing money from me to buy his own beer.”



“There was never a rough moment where we were totally struggling. We just did whatever we had to do.”