

[Shah family roots firmly planted]

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Shah family roots firmly planted

The Shah family of Lake Cowichan are Pakistanis whose ancestors originally came from Afghanistan and later settled in Mardan or what was then known as the Northwest Frontier. Renat Shah who lives on Grass Lake Road in Lake Cowichan was born and raised in Mardan. His family were farmers there, growing just enough to make a living. At age 18 he travelled to Bombay where he obtained work as a supervisor of kitchen help in a rooming hotel. Following that he took a domestic job in the home of a wealthy Indian family. Unhappy with this life he moved back to the family farm in Mardan.

In 1947, the year India gained its independence from Britain, the son in which the Shah family was living became Pakistan. Renat and one son worked in the new Indian embassy in Karachi, Pakistan.

Renat's older brother Ghafoor Khan had taken work on a cargo ship when only 16 years old. He travelled the world many times visiting ports such as Grenada, France, Glasgow, and New York. He had been a seaman for several years when the second world war broke out, his ship per (Lao Esquimaux) to be converted to a war

Indo Canadian

Joan Mayo



ship. There was a six month lay over in Bombay when the crew received regular pay but were allowed to go where they wished. During this period Ghafoor met Sir Robert Hoffman, who was in government service in Victoria. Sir Hoffman took a liking to Ghafoor and having an son of his own offered to sponsor him so that he need not go back to the ship during war time.

After a while Ghafoor moved to Alberta but feeling he had done something dishonest by leaving Sir Hoffman he returned to B.C., but convinced his benefactor he no longer needed his assistance and asked to be allowed to make his own way. He settled in the Lake Cowichan area where he worked 35 years in the mill at Ysartou.

In 1963 he sponsored the immigration of his younger brother.

Renat arrived in Canada alone finding a job in a sawmill in Golden B.C. In 1964 he brought his wife, six sons and three daughters to live with him there. They lived in Golden for 9½ years and two more sons were born there. Raising from the sawmill he moved his family to Lake Cowichan so he near his older brother. With the help of his large family, he built a home where his younger children attended high school.

Following the death of his wife, the older brother Ghafoor, along with one son and his wife took his wife remains back to Pakistan for burial, leaving two sons in Lake Cowichan. He had only been back in Pakistan 1½ years when he died. He was very unhappy there and missed his beloved Canada having lived here for 48 years.

In his halting English Renat told how much he loves Canada. He likes the people and is so happy here he wants to stay here always. He and his lovely wife now have 23 grand children. Three of his sons married Canadian girls who converted to the familiar Muslim faith.

One son Zohb, explained a little of the Muslim faith and culture. Every day is a holy day to the Muslims who pray five times a day. Their holy book, the Koran, was written by the prophet Muhammad. They believe none of what is written in the Christian bible which they call the Injil but do not believe Jesus was the son of God only that he was a prophet. They believe there were 28 prophets and Muhammad, Abraham, Moses and David are also believe in the story of Adam and Eve.

Muslims take no alcohol and eat no pork. One of their more important holy times is called Ramadan when they fast from 3 a.m. - 9 p.m. Every day for 30 days. Then comes the celebration of Eid when family and friends gather for a feast, eating lamb, chicken, minkay, goat or beef.

Another son Ayaz, along with a sister, own and operate the Oasis Restaurant opposite the Donut Shop on the Trans Canada Hwy.

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