

Darshan Singh Johal

It is with heavy hearts we say farewell to Darshan. He passed away peacefully while sleeping within 24 hours of being admitted to Royal Jubilee Hospital. He was 92 years old, an incredible human being—a scholar, a visionary urban planner and true humanitarian. He lived a life full of love for his family, relatives and close friends. He enjoyed playing golf, reading poetry and listening to music, perusing the Sunday newspapers for garage sales, and going to the Sikh Temple with son Paul to meet others in the community and have a curry lunch.

Darshan was born in Punjab, India and came to Canada in 1950 with his brother Mejour when he was 17 years old to join his father Pall Singh. Pall Singh came to Canada in 1908. Like many Punjabi's he worked in the lumber mills in B.C. He returned to India three times, (1914, 1920, 1948). Their mother Chand Kaur told their father that he should return to Canada and live there permanently for the boy's sake. He settled in Youbou, Vancouver Island in 1949.

At age 16, just prior to leaving India, Darshan passed the prestigious Giyani exam. Thanks to a hard work ethic and community supports at the B.C. Forest Products sawmill, he enrolled in Lake Cowichan High School, graduating with the class of 1952. He attended the University of British Columbia (UBC) on scholarship, and in 1958 received a Master of Science Degree in Community and Regional Planning. At UBC he met Kulmindar (Mindy) Kaur Dhillon who was enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program. They married on July 30, 1959. At this time, his father was also living in Vancouver.

Darshan's career began as Community and Regional Planner, District Municipality of North Vancouver. As the eldest child in his family, he steadfastly assumed his responsibility as an

older brother and was always there when needed. In 1959 Darshan and Mindy moved to Victoria, BC—Mindy's birthplace with family roots —because his younger brother Parshan (deceased) and sister Gurcharan (Sharon) were immigrating to Canada from India. Their mother Chand Kaur had passed away in India. As Assistant Director with the Capital Region Planning Board, Darshan's design contributions included Ring Road at the University of Victoria.

Always globally minded and keen to join the United Nations, Darshan accepted an offer from the UN to teach Community and Regional Planning at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, Ghana (1963-1968). Mindy and their toddlers Paul, Sheila and Ramina moved with him to Ghana. On completion of his assignment, Darshan accepted a permanent position at UN headquarters in New York. (Mindy worked and studied in tandem with Darshan's postings—teaching nursing, practicing midwifery and earning a Master of Science Degree in Nursing at Columbia University). After building his technical expertise with the UN, Darshan was among the pioneers in establishing the UN Centre for Human Settlements (HABITAT) in Nairobi, Kenya. Mindy and Ramina moved with Darshan to Nairobi in 1979 where Darshan remained until his retirement from the UN in 1994 after 31 years. Darshan's motivation to improve the lives of others did not waver; he immediately transitioned into Founding Director of the International Centre for Sustainable Cities (ICSC) in Vancouver, B.C, 1994-1997. In 1997, while working at the ICSC, UN Secretary -General Kofi Annan requested Darshan to return to the UN, appointing him to lead the UN agency he helped to establish. Darshan and Mindy returned to Nairobi, Kenya for a year while Darshan served as UN Assistant Secretary General and Acting Executive Director of HABITAT. During his career with the UN, he worked in 130 countries; Mindy worked in 25. Darshan fully retired in Victoria in 1998 and it wasn't long before Darshan and Mindy rekindled old connections and began close friendships with a new group of friends for get-togethers and outings. In his

later years, Darshan immensely enjoyed attending the senior day programme at the Luther Court Society.

His funeral service (McCall Gardens) was in Victoria on November 17, 2025, and attended by a small group of family and relatives. A Celebration of Life will be held in 2026.

Condolences may be offered to the family below.

McCall Gardens

www.mccallgardens.com



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