

Paul Singh Dhaliwal

Paul Singh Dhaliwal was born on May 14, 1914 in the village of Chunнанwal, Punjab. As a child he went to the village school to learn Gurmukhi. His father Santa Singh had lived in Canada for several years but had passed away before he could bring his family to Canada. Paul Singh came to Canada in 1932 at the age of 16 to come live with his uncle Pagat Singh who had now taken him under his wing. His journey began by taking a train to Calcutta, then a ship to Hong Kong where he stayed at a gurdwara for two weeks. In this time he met his friend Lal Singh who was a Vancouver resident who was visiting family and friends in India. The gurdwara officials took Dhaliwal and Lal Singh to a Chinese doctor for their medical examination. Dhaliwal then went to visit a man from his village who lent him 95 dollars for a ticket on a President Lines ship to take him to Canada. On the ship, the more experienced Indian passengers helped Dhaliwal cook his own food which usually consisted of boiled potatoes. This leg of the journey took 19 days.

When he arrived in Canada (May 9, 1932) he followed another Indian passenger to a house on 2nd avenue where he stayed for a few days. A week later, he was reunited with his uncle and two went to work at a Greenlake Mill (near Whistler) making 15 cents per hour. He lived in a bunkhouse with 20 other Punjabi mill workers. Dhaliwal notes that the East Asians lived in a separate bunkhouse and whites in another. He was thankful that his Sikh mill workers had created a small gurdwara (similar structure to Abbotsford's Heritage Temple) on the site that he made sure to visit every Sunday. Dhaliwal recalls that there was no medical, unemployment or welfare coverage so when he stayed at the Vancouver General Hospital he had to pay 4 dollars a day for his month's stay. He worked at the Green lake mill until it shut down in the winter.

He returned to Abbotsford and lived with his uncle who owned a home and property near the gurdwara. Paul Singh found a job a month later in Duncan at the Hillcrest mill where he again lived in a bunkhouse. Here they all paid a cook and divided the grocery bill amongst themselves. If there was anything they needed it had to be in walking distance as only the mill owners could afford cars. Dhaliwal then went on to work in various different mills. Dhaliwal explains that in the 1930s Abbotsford consisted of the Heritage Temple and old Abbotsford; a majority of Abbotsford residents at this time were Punjabi farmers. Dhaliwal lists other pioneers he knew in Abbotsford at 24:23 and their pinds at 25:26. There were very few Indian women. Both Indian men and women wore western clothing in order to blend in as much as possible. Particularly, Indian women wore long coats with skirts or dresses. Dhaliwal cut his long hair and beard to be able to maneuver better in wrestling as well as to better assimilate to Canadian culture. He then took to fedoras to cover his head.

Dhaliwal recalls listening to the radio in the late 1930s as Germany was invading various countries. When war was declared in 1939, he understood the seriousness of the situation knowing it would just as difficult as the First World War. But living in Canada, he was less concerned about the events in Europe than the events in Japan as British Columbia became suspicious of Japanese-Canadians. The only difference in lifestyle Dhaliwal experienced was the occasional bomb drills and rationing. In addition, as many young men were at war, most businesses were in need of employees so it was very easy to find work. Dhaliwal knew of 2 Indo-Canadian men who joined the army, Fungan Singh Gill and Diwan Singh.

Diwan Singh dropped out before being shipped to Italy as he found out he would only get the pay of an Indian soldier as opposed to a Canadian soldier. Dhaliwal himself attempted to join the army but was denied entry after failing a medical exam. However, most Indians decided not to go to war until they were granted citizenship and franchise. The Khalsa Diwan Society worked with the Indo-Canadian community to find well a well-educated man (name at 42:26) to deal with the Canadian government on the issue. Dhaliwal remembers how hard it was to be denied citizenship and rights. He believes that people today should appreciate those rights and make sure to vote at every election. Also, once the British left India Dhaliwal enjoyed a greater freedom to travel back and forth between India and Canada.

Dhaliwal explains that when he was young, very few white people would socialize with Indians. Dhaliwal feels the barrier between themselves and whites may have been due to language and cultural differences. He feels that all immigrants, regardless of where they come from, face similar issues of assimilation. Personally, he found most people were very friendly adding that he never bothered to befriend a blatantly racist person as they could never change. Furthermore, most restaurants allowed Indian patrons however Dhaliwal recalls one restaurant on Georgia and Robson in Vancouver which had a sign reading "East Indians not allowed". In addition, a Vancouver theatre allowed Indian patrons however they could not wear a turban.

Dhaliwal explains that the Indian community became closer after the Second World War. For instance, before the war, there was very little electricity, phones or cars. But after the war, the country experienced a boom in technology which allowed the community to gather more frequently.

Dhaliwal enjoyed going to the Western Sports Club and participating in wrestling matches. In 1945, Ted Thigh, an American promoter spotted Dhaliwal and offered him a job as a professional wrestler. Dhaliwal explained to him that he would love the job but couldn't travel without a passport. So the promoter took him to the American embassy and finally Dhaliwal was allowed to travel. He toured throughout the United States for a year fighting in numerous high profile wrestling matches, earning hundreds of dollars per match. (name 31:25). His exercise regime included push-ups, squats and weights which he maintained throughout his life. By 1950, Paul Dhaliwal was married and decided to quit the professional wrestling scene to better manage his successful trucking business. This business consisted of moving sawdust and wood used to heat stoves and furnaces.

In 1946, Dhaliwal returned to India taking a president lines military ship. He was married at the age of 31 to Mahinder Kaur. They eventually had 6 children. He returned to Canada in 1950, sponsoring his wife and his nephew Gurdev Singh. Dhaliwal and his wife had been residing in Mission for the past 12 years (1996). He bought his first home in downtown Mission in 1942. He had taken over some else's business explaining that during the war, people could only buy businesses, not start new ones. It cost \$3500 to pay for the lot and materials to build the house.

In response to what Dhaliwal likes the most about Canada, he answered that Canadian are honest people. For example, prices are fixed so there is no bartering, people will politely stand in an organized line when waiting for their turn. Dhaliwal still enjoys India and plans to visit every year.