

Sukhdev Singh Dhaliwal

Sukhdev Singh Dhaliwal was born on March 15, 1933 and came to Canada in June, 1949 from the village Toosey, district Ludhiana, Punjab, India. He came to Canada with his cousin Ajmer Singh Dhaliwal, Ajmer's wife Joginder Kaur Dhaliwal, his other cousin Bhag Singh Dhaliwal, and his friend Swarn Singh Dhalia. Sukhdev Singh's father, Amar Singh Dhaliwal, received them at the airport. Amar Singh's elder brother, Bishan Singh, was the first in the family to arrive to Canada in 1909 and sponsored Amar Singh Dhaliwal who arrived in 1926. Amar Singh lived in Vancouver with his brother when he came to Canada.

When Sukhdev Singh came to Canada he was a young boy at only sixteen years old. He later attended night school so that he could learn English. Sukhdev Singh's uncle, Bishan Singh learned English at work and his father Amar Singh had completed grade 10 in India so he could also understand some English. Upon arrival in Canada, Sukhdev Singh moved to Mission and resided in a mill bunk house which he shared with five to six other people. However, he didn't start working right away because he was too young, as one was only allowed to work after he turned sixteen years old. Sukhdev Singh explains how for a while, he would simply walk around all day by himself, as there was no one in the mill of his age. Also, he did not know Punjabi because he studied Urdu and English until grade seven in India. He explains how his English was very limited at first, mainly consisting of common words such as 'Coca-Cola' or '7-up.' During this time, he started visiting stores to buy groceries which further improved his English as he tried to communicate with the people at the store.

Sukhdev Singh started working at a sawmill in Youbou in October of 1949 when he was about sixteen and half years old. His father had called his friend Jaswant Singh Brar in Youbou to find Sukhdev Singh a job in the mill Jaswant Singh was working at. Upon receiving the job, Sukhdev Singh travelled to Youbou and stayed in a bunkhouse with his father. Sukhdev mentions an important point that at the time, that the only means of transport to Vancouver Island was through the CPR boats, so he and his father had to travel by boat. A few days after their arrival, both of them started working in the Western Forest Industry mill. Sukhdev Singh's starting pay at the mill was \$1.08 an hour for union wages and 40 hours a week. The two-storey bunkhouse sheltered 75 workers who were provided with a cook to prepare their daily meals. The monthly cost for the groceries and cook was around \$20 - \$25 which was a shared expense paid by each millworker. Sukhdev Singh stayed at this mill for two and half years.

After working in the Western Forest mill for two and half years Sukhdev's father Amar Singh purchased a share in a mill in Richmond. The mill was previously owned by Giani Ranjot Singh Grewal and four-five partners came together to put shares in it. Some of the partners among them were Giani Ranjot Singh Grewal, Kehar Singh Ghela, and Paul Singh Dhaliwal. Sukhdev Singh then started working in this mill and was paid the regular wage union wage around \$1.50- \$2 per hour. He worked in the mill for over a year until the mill was destroyed by fire. Although there was insurance for the mill, Amar Singh still lost money and a lot of business. After this incident, Sukhdev Singh and his father moved to Honeymoon Bay to work at the Western Sawmill where they earned \$2 - \$2.50 per hour.

After living five years in Canada, Sukhdev Singh obtained his citizenship and returned to India for the first time in 1954. On his first trip back to India, Sukhdev Singh was married Amarjit Kaur Sekhon and then after a month his sister was also married. Once he returned to Canada in 1955, he continued to work at the Honeymoon Bay sawmill where he worked until December 1980.

Sukhdev Singh's wife came to Canada in 1956 with the couple's first son Sukhraj who was born in 1956. Sukhdev Singh's father, Amar Singh bought him a two-bedroom house for \$5000 in Lake Cowichan before the arrival of his daughter-in-law and grandson. He also bought the family a used Ford Cougar for \$1000. Amarjit Kaur never worked but instead stayed home to raise her five children: Sukhraj, Balwinder, Sukhjinder, Arjinder, and Sukhpal. All of the Dhaliwal children attended school in Lake Cowichan.

Sukhdev Singh later bought his son a store called Tansor Service that consisted of groceries, gas pumps, a mechanic shop, and garage in 1977. However, when the business didn't run very well for the first three years, he quit his job at the mill and took over by working full time at the store in 1980. He recalls this as a tough time and how the family was lucky to have other income sources coming in from their three rental properties. The family was bringing in around \$200 to \$300 a month from the rental properties. Later, Sukhdev Singh also built another house on Cowell Hill which increased their rental property to \$400- \$500. The Dhaliwal family ran the store for 13 years until Sukhdev Singh leased the store to his friend who was having losses in his contractor business. All of the children used to work at the store. Sukhdev Singh's wife also participated by doing jobs such as offering tea or coffee, and also talking to the Indian ladies who came to the stores.

The family grocery store's specialty was Indian food. Although there was another Indian food store nearby, it closed down soon after Sukhdev Singh started his store. Sukhdev Singh remembers how they even gave special recipes to the Caucasian people in the community who didn't know how to cook Indian food like curry, which was very appreciated by their customers.

In 1991 Sukhdev Singh sold his store after leasing it for two years. Being a businessman by nature, he further invested in buying five rental cabins in Duncan bringing in \$250 a month from each cabin. Sukhdev Singh's wife, Amarjit Kaur, passed away on January 1, 2000. He later remarried Joginder Kaur Dhaliwal in India. Today, Sukhdev Singh is blessed with nine grandchildren and two great grandchildren. He lives happily with his wife and his grandson Amritpal.