

Saw Mill Worker Stories
Raghubir Singh Dhaliwal Narration
Interview Date: February 9th, 2015

Raghubir Singh Dhaliwal was born on February 2, 1944 in the Village Dhaliwal located in Punjab, India. While in India, Raghubir worked in an office position for a short time and also attended school in his Village.

Raghubir Singh first immigrated to Canada on November 2, 1972 on a visitor basis at the age of 28. Soon after arriving in Canada, Raghubir Singh began working at the Nanoose Forest Products Mill Company owned by Mayo Singh Minhas which was located in Chemainus. In this mill, Raghubir Singh was required to work as a lumber puller on the green chain, which was a very difficult job as it required pulling very heavy lumber blocks. He also worked other positions in the Nanoose Mill including: trimming, drop sorting, etc. According to Raghubir Singh, the Mayo family were good employers as it was also a unionized company. After a short time, approximately three months at the Nanoose Mill, Raghubir Singh then went to work in Nanaimo at a mill called Best Western Mills where he continued to do just lumber pulling. According to Raghubir Singh, out of the approximate 65-70 men working in this particular mill, 35-40 of those men were Punjabi. Raghubir Singh claims that all the Punjabi men who worked in the mills were very hard working because that was their nature; for example, the men would be physically exhausted but they would not leave the work.

During this time, Raghubir Singh lived in Duncan while his wife was in India. However, one and a half to two years after Raghubir Singh's migration to Canada, his wife also came and joined him. Raghubir Singh recalls how there were around 250 Punjabi families living in Duncan at the time of his migration. According to Raghubir Singh there were known incidents of accidents in the mills. For example, one story recounts how at the Nanoose Mill, thirty five or thirty six years ago, a young boy was crushed under a tilt host. There were other minor incidents here and there but nothing major. Overall, though Raghubir Singh recognizes the benefits of unionized work as well as the Union Pension, MSP and Dental coverage, he says mill work was never guaranteed because if the mill stopped, the work stopped. Unfortunately, due to back problems, Raghubir Singh had to retire from his mill work in 2004.