

Raghbir Singh Dhaliwal Transcription

Interview Date: February 9th, 2015

SB: Hello Uncle Ji what is your name?

RD: My name is Raghbir.

SB: What is your date of birth?

RD: 1944, 2nd February.

SB: Ok and where were you born?

RD: India. In Punjab.

SBains: Pind?

RD: Dhaliwal pind.

SB: When did you immigrate to Canada?

RD: I came to Canada in 1972.

SB: Do you remember what month?

RD: 2nd November.

SB: At that time what was your immigration status? How did you come here?

RD: I came as a visitor.

SB: When you applied for immigration, did you apply on the point system, family sponsorship?

RD: At that time immigration was free for everyone.

SB: Ok. And when you arrived in Canada...actually before you arrived in Canada, where did you used to live?

RD: In the pind.

SB: In the pind. Did you work there or study there?

RD: I was working and studied a bit too, then I worked.

SB: What did you study?

RD: Whatever they taught in the pind just like school here. English, Punjabi, Hindi, Math, Science. There were 4-5 subjects.

SB: How old were you when you came to Canada?

RD: I was 28.

SB: What kind of work did you do in India? Farm work

GT: I did a bit of office work for a short time too.

SB: When you came here to Canada, when did you start working in the mills?

RD: In 1973.

SB: And when did you come here?

RD: I came in '72.

SB: How did you find that work? In the first mill?

RD: Through people I knew.

SB: Do you remember the name of that mill?

RD: Nanoose Forest Products.

SB: Where was that?

RD: Chemainus. It was on the highway.

SB: In that mill, what job did you start working at?

RD: Lumber pulling.

SB: You pulled lumber. On the green chain?

RD: On the green chain.

SB: How long did you stay at that job?

RD: 3-4 months.

SB: How did the work seem at first?

RD: It seemed hard at first.

SB: It seemed hard?

RD: Of course it seemed hard at first.

SB: Why? Was it very different?

RD: It was very different. Pulling heavy, heavy lumber blocks. At first it always seems hard.

SB: How did Canada seem to you when you came here?

RD: Canada seemed very good to me.

SB: How did it seem good to you?

RD: Here there are all the opportunities. There are all the benefits. The weather is nice. It's good for health.

SB: After that mill where did you go next?

RD: I did some work in that mill and then after that I went to Nanaimo.

SB: Did you stay on the green chain?

RD: No, the jobs kept changing.

SB: After working on the green chain where did you work?

RD: Well I worked many jobs. I worked at trimming, I worked at drop sorting, I worked as an ager...

SBains: Did you get jobs according to experience?

RD: They would post jobs. They would post training jobs. Then they would give us training. Then we would get the job after completing training.

SB: How many apney worked in the mill?

RD: There were about 35-40 men.

SB: How many men were there in total?

RD: When we worked about 65-70 men.

SB: When they would post a job in the mill, could our men easily get the jobs?

RD: Usually. According to seniority.

SBains: What was the condition of our people at the time? Were they hard-working, would they work both shifts, were they committed to their work?

RD: Sister, our people are very hardworking. They could be physically exhausted but would not leave the work. That's the way our men are.

SBains: 7 days a week?

RD: 5 days a week.

SBains: 5 days? And where did you live then?

RD: Me? I lived here in Duncan.

SBains: So you had no experience living in a cookhouse?

RD: No, there wasn't a cook.

SBains: Had they closed [the cookhouses]?

RD: Yes they had closed.

SB: Were you married when you came to Canada?

RD: Yes I was already married.

SB: So was your family in India or..?

RD: They were in India.

SB: After how long did they come to Canada?

RD: They came after about a year and a half. 1.5 to 2 years.

SBains: Since then have you always lived in Duncan?

RD: Yes, just here.

SBains: Did you work in Nanoose? The entire time?

RD: In Nanoose and for a little time in Nanaimo when the work stopped in Nanoose.

SBains: Was this the Doman mill?

RD: Yes it was the Doman mill.

SBains: Were they good employers?

RD: They were good. We just were there to work and get paid.

SB: Uncle Ji was that a union mill?

RD: Yes, union mill.

SB: Ok. The Nanaimo mill you went to after Nanoose, do you remember which mill that was? Do you remember the name?

RD: At that time they may be called it Western Forest Product

SB: How long did you work there?

RD: I only worked there for a short time.

SB: Did you work one job there?

RD: Just one job.

SB: Which—

RD: ---lumber pulling.

SB: Lumber pulling? Ok. So when and why did you leave the work there?

RD: I got back problems and I left the work in 2004.

SB: Was it [the back problem] because of the mill work?

RD: Because of the mill work.

SBains: Was it chronic problem or did it get better?

RD: It was chronic.

SBains: When your wife came here did she work or did she stay at home?

RD: Mostly she stayed at home.

SBains: It wasn't difficult for her to get used to Canada, was it?

RD: No it wasn't difficult for her.

SBains: How much of a Punjabi community was there in Duncan? How many families were there?

RD: Now or...

SBains: Back then.

RD: About 250 then.

SBains: Even then?

RD: Yes. Now there must be about 150.

SBains: Really. Now are there mostly older people here or are there young people too?

RD: There's roughly a mix. The young will leave to go to jobs. But there's a mix. There's old and young people.

SBains: Is there any story that comes to your mind from that time. Something that makes you reminisce or some experience you had?

RD; No, nothing. I did work.

SBains: Uncle Ji were there accidents in the mill? Did you see any accidents?

RD: There were accidents that happened. I didn't see with my eyes. Through our relatives there was a boy that died in the mills.

SB: How? What happened?

RD: The thing on which the blocks go is called the tilt host. It broke. He was standing behind it and he ended up in it.

SB: How long ago did this happen? In what year did it happen?

RD: It must have happened 35-36 years ago.

SB: In Nanoose?

RD: In Nanoose.

SB: But this didn't happened often did it? Accidents only happened once in a while, right?

RD: No. Small minor injuries would always happen.

SBains: Brother, in mill work there were a lot of advantages for our people. For people that would come from India, they would get work quickly. What advantages were there for our people?

RD: Like what?

SBains: What were good things about the mill?

RD: There were some changes, the unions were made. When we retired we started getting union pension. At that time we got MSP, we got dental. There were these kinds of advantages.

SBains: Through this work there was security for people?

RD: For security, you knew for as long as you kept working you would get union pension. That was the only security. Other than that there was no security. If a mill stopped your work would stop.

RD: Is that all?

SBains: Thank you brother.

SBrar: Thank you Uncle Ji.