

[Narrative of Sohan Singh Labh]

Saw Mill Worker Stories

Sohan Singh Labh Narrative

Interview Date: February 8th, 2015

Sohan Singh Labh was born in the year 1911 in Victoria. His father had come to Canada in 1905 and his mother had immigrated to Canada in 1922. At that time the men were not allowed to bring their wives for a number of years, so she was one of the first women to come to Canada. His sister was born in 1926 and she was the first South Asian girl born in Victoria. Mr. Labh's sister passed away in 1945.

Mr. Labh started working in a mill full time in 1955. Before that, he started working when he was studying in high school and during his two month summer vacation, he used to work in the mill. Thus, he started working when he was 15 years old part-time during his school breaks. He graduated from high school in 1929 after which he worked for a year and in 1930 he went to India to get married though he would only stay for a year. Mr. Labh first worked for a trucking company in Victoria that was owned by a South Asian for approximately five years and in 1955, he began working in BC Forest Products, which was the main saw mill in Victoria. He worked there until 1991, the year it closed down. After that he took early retirement at the age of 60. That is the only mill where he worked for 33 years and prior to that he drove a truck for five years before starting his mill job. There was a pension plan, though he lost a little bit of pension due to early retirement. If he would have worked until 60 years age he would have received his full pension. In addition, Mr. Labh could have worked in Vancouver or up in the Island for few more years but his wife was quite ill at that time, so he opted for the early retirement. She passed away in 1993.

When Mr. Labh was young, he played a lot of sports and he even started the soccer team called "Punjab United." Although it was a South Asian Football Club in 1952, they had some people of European origin players also in the team because there were not enough people from South Asia. As such, Mr. Labh is the founder of first Punjabi soccer team in Victoria. Later there was a book written on the Soccer team in Victoria and there were write-ups about Indian soccer players in that book. The reason it was called Punjab United Team because there were some Punjabi boys in that team who were born in Canada, so it was called "United." There was a separate First Nations Soccer Team as well because there were many Aboriginal people living in Duncan at that time, but they were not that involved in sports. The year they were competing, that time there were German, Dutch and Scottish teams as well. Most South Asian people on the Island lived in Pardi rather than Duncan, which was 3-4 miles from Duncan. In 1958 while he was playing many of these sports, Mr. Labh contemplated cutting his hair off as he thought it would be more practical. Although he did, his younger brother kept his long hair all his life (he passed away three

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