

Nazar Singh Gill

INTERVIEWER- What is your full name?

Nazar- Nazar Singh Gill

Interviewer- what is your date of birth?

Nazar- 18 May '33

Interviewer- what village are you from in India?

Nazar- Pindh Dhudike

Interviewer- On what date did you come to Canada, for the first time?

Nazar- 1963 New Year

Interviewer- during the day?

Nazar- at 10 o'clock in the morning

Interviewer- did you come alone?

NAZAR- no I came with my young daughter

Interviewer- what's her name?

Nazar- Kero Tiwana

Interviewer- Does she live in Abbotsford?

NAZAR- yes

Interviewer- how old was she when she came with you?

Nazar- One and a half years old

Interviewer- Just you both came?

Nazar- yes

Interviewer- and your wife?

Nazar- she came before, she was a citizen here. She had applied for us to come here.

Interviewer- she then went to India? Was she born here?

Nazar- she was a citizen of here but born in India. Her father was here but she was born in India, he had applied for her citizenship. She got her citizenship being in India. We were not able to come together, so she came first and then applied for us. We were able to come then.

Interviewer-Do you know what year she came?

Nazar- in 1952

Interviewer- Did she come alone?

Nazar- yes, alone

Interviewer- Her father applied for her?

Nazar- yes her father was a Canadian citizen. When she was born, he registered her birth.

Interviewer- what year did her father come?

Nazar- he came in 1912 or 1915 I believe. After coming here, he would come and go back and forth.

Interviewer- what's your wife's name?

Nazar- Bachan Gill

Interviewer- how did you come here? Like ship...?

Nazar- no plane. Dehli to Hong Kong, Hong Kong to Vancouver.

Interviewer- after coming here what work did you do?

Nazar- in a mill.

Interviewer- did you start work right away.

Nazar- no, 18 days after arriving. I started on January 18th.

Interviewer- was the mill in Abbotsford.

Nazar- no in Mission.

Interviewer- do you remember the name of the mill?

Nazar- Harman Saw mill.

Interviewer- What were your wages?

Nazar- \$1.50 per hour

Interviewer- how many hours did you work in one day?

Nazar- sometimes 9, sometimes 10.

Interviewer- did you work at the mill alone or were there others there that you knew?

Nazar- what do you mean alone?

Interviewer- did you know other men that worked with you?

NAZAR- yes there were 25 of us that worked there.

Interviewer- did they refer you for the job?

Nazar- no, my uncle referred me for the job.

Interviewer- did he live here?

Nazar- no, in Langley. Shergill.

Interviewer- he had come before you?

Nazar- he has been here for a long time, since 1932 or 1933

Interviewer- who did you live with?

Nazar- in the mill, there was a small house, in there.

Interviewer- a bunkhouse?

Nazar- no not a bunk house, just a house

Interviewer- who else lived with you?

Nazar- my wife and my daughter.

Interviewer- so just the three of you?

Nazar- yes

Interviewer- you rented the place?

Nazar- yes

Interviewer- so you paid the mill the money?

Nazar- yes, the mill's owner.

Interviewer- how much the rent?

Nazar- \$26 per month.

Interviewer- the food was extra?

Nazar- yes

Interviewer- how much roughly was the groceries bill for the month, do you remember?

Nazar- it was very low then, for the month it was about less \$200. Between \$150-200 in total. The items were very cheap then.

Interviewer- was grocery easily accessible?

Nazar- yes, it was nearby. The store was one block away.

Interviewer- what activities did you do after work?

Nazar- we just stayed home. It was winter then, after work we stayed at home, then back to work.

Interviewer- were there any community celebrations?

Nazar- no there were none.

Interviewer- was there a gurudwara?

Nazar- yes, there was a gurudwara here in Abbotsford, the old one. When there was a function, like a wedding in March, I came then, and in June/July when there was a community get together. I came about two times in that year, the first year.

Interviewer- what kind of clothes did you wear? Pants or a kurtha pajama?

Nazar- pants with a coat.

Interviewer- suits?

Nazar- no, just plain pants and a coat, also to work. Like now how people wear night suits and go out and about, we didn't do that.

Interviewer- so it was formal. Did your wife wear traditional clothes, or did she also wear pants?

Nazar- no she wore Indian suits.

Interviewer- when she went out?

Nazar- she still wore her Indian suits.

Interviewer- does your whole family live in Abbotsford now?

Nazar- yes my whole family lives in Abbotsford, but one daughter is in Chilliwack and one in Surrey.

Interviewer- how many children do you have?

Nazar- 6

Interviewer- 3 daughters?

Nazar- no 5 daughters.

Interviewer- the rest of your children were born here?

Nazar- yes, the rest here.

Interviewer- only one in India

Nazar- yes just one.

Interviewer- which hospital were your kids born?

Nazar- on in Langley hospital, then rest in Mission hospital.

Interviewer- did you go to the temple after?

NAZAR-no, we didn't have a car then, and no ride. We came home after the hospital.

Interviewer- did you live in Mission?

Nazar- yes

Interviewer- how did you go to the hospital?

Nazar- taxi

Interviewer- how much was the taxi fare?

Nazar- about \$2-2.5 one way. The hospital was nearby.

Interviewer- when did you return to India for the first time?

Nazar- in '67 december 15th.

Interviewer- did you go alone?

Nazar- no with my wife and one daughter.

Interviewer- how much the air fare?

Nazar- the ticket was about \$900 return for one person.

Interviewer- what were your wages at that time?

Nazar- when I went, my wages were about \$8.

Interviewer- it increased quite a bit! Did it gradually increase or suddenly?

Nazar- no gradually, with the union. Started at \$1.50 and retired at \$24. When I retired in '92.

Interviewer- did the hours remain the same, like 9 or 10 hours a day?

Nazar- in the union it was 8 hours a day, and if need be then over time hours and we were paid time and a half.

Interviewer- when you first came your wages were \$1.50, what were the wages like for others?

Nazar- theirs were, the people that had started before me, some were at \$1.60 and some at \$1.70. I was new so mine was \$1.50. the owner paid the new employees less the first year, then slowing increased it.

Interviewer- do you remember the owner's name?

Nazar- Harman Braich.

Interviewer- is he still alive?

Nazar- no he passed away

Interviewer- his family?

Nazar- his family is still here, his wife and kids.

Interviewer- where do they live?

Nazar- in Mission.

Interviewer- when you came here, did the white people get along with the east Indians?

Nazar- yes, the white people were very nice.

Interviewer-did you make friends?

Nazar- yes, they helped. We didn't know how to speak English and if we spoke wrong, they didn't tease us like is done now. They would teach us the correct word, and then slowly by learning a new word each day, we learnt. The white people then, used to help us a lot, especially to the new person, no matter what country they were from.

Interviewer- was the Indian community close?

Nazar- the Indian community would also help one another. But they were not that many of us. In Abbotsford, there were about 3 families, in Mission about 20 families.

Interviewer- did mostly white people work in the mill?

Nazar- there was an even distribution, half and half.

Interviewer- did people from mission come too?

Nazar- yes everyone came from Mission, and the white people were also from Abbotsford. All the east Indian people were from Mission.

Interviewer- when you were at work, what did your wife do?

Nazar- she stayed at home. She took care of the kids.

Interviewer- the other wives did the same?

Nazar- then, none of the women worked. Then we, in '66, some ladies, 5-6, from Mission would come to Abbotsford and work.

Interviewer- where did they work?

Nazar- in farms.

Interviewer- what did they do in the farms?

Nazar- basic farm labour like picking berries.

Interviewer- what did they get paid?

Nazar- if they worked hourly then 80 cents a hour, for a flat it was 75 cents.

Interviewer- how many hours did they work a day?

Nazar- it depended, 8 or 9 hours, on the weather.

Interviewer- did someone pick everyone up?

Nazar- the employer did

Interviewer- where were the kids at this time?

Nazar- the kids were, at that time I had the night shift for a month, so I kept the kids during the day and when she came home, I worked at night.

Interviewer- when did you sleep?

Nazar- for 2-4 hours

Interviewer- did your kids go to school here?

Nazar- yes here in Canada

Interviewer- did you put them in school from the beginning?

Nazar- yes

Interviewer- did the other families live nearby, were you able to walk?

Nazar- yes, we walked to each other's place. Cars were scarce then so, only like 4 families had cars. We walked to get our groceries, to visit one another, and walked to the doctor.

Interviewer- the doctor was close by?

Nazar- the doctor was in town, he was nearby, about half a mile.

Interviewer- did the families socialize often?

Nazar- yes every Saturday and Sunday, sometimes they would come visit me and sometimes we visited them.

Interviewer- was it very different then?

Nazar- yes very different. People used to love one another and helped one another. It still happens today but now its not as genuine as before. There were about 20 families in Mission, when I came here, 15 families had me over for dinner and nobody knew me, just because I was from India, Punjab.

Interviewer- they were helping you.

Nazar- no, just out of love.

Interviewer- when you left India for Canada, what did you expect it to be, what were your hopes?

Nazar- my biggest hope then was that, we used to hear a lot about Canada from our uncle who would always come back and forth, we found out that the nation is very good and beautiful. My personal hope was, after 5 years citizenship was granted, to become a citizen, save some money, and come back to my village and build a new home and buy some land for farming. When we starting working here and even became a citizen, that dream was forgotten. I went after 17 years for the first time.

Interviewer- was the rest of your family in India?

Nazar- yes the rest was all in India. Only me from my family was abroad.

Interviewer- did you used to call them or just write?

Nazar- no just wrote, the phones did not work then.

Interviewer- they wrote back?

Nazar- in a month, I would write a letter or two and vice versa. The letters kept coming and going.

Interviewer- did they inquire when you were returning?

Nazar- yes they asked but the conditions were not right. With wages of \$1.50, we were not able to save much.

Interviewer- how much would the ticket have been if you were to return back then.

Nazar- \$900. Then it was less than that, I went a second and third time and it was \$700 then. It then increased like its now \$1600, minus or plus some.

Interviewer- when you came for the first time, your ticket cost \$900?

Nazar- no, when I came for the first time, my ticket was about \$650, one way. My uncle had paid for my ticket. The one whom I came to visit.

Interviewer- did you frequently send money to India?

Nazar- yes, one dollar was about 4.5 rupees. They went via bank.

Interviewer- who was present in your family in India.

Nazar- my two sisters and three brothers and mom and dad.

Interviewer- did your siblings or parents come here?

Nazar- everyone came here. My brothers are here now and my parents passed away.

Interviewer- here or in India?

Nazar- my father passed away here and mother when she went to India.

Interviewer- did they come here at least once?

Nazar- yes they lived here and even went back once or twice for a trip.

Interviewer- what year did they come?

Nazar- they came in 1971, I believe.

Interviewer- did your sisters and brothers all come together?

Nazar- no, my brothers came before and my parents and one sister came after in '71.

Interviewer- and your other sister?

Nazar- she came in, I guess, '86-87.

Interviewer- was she married?

Nazar- she was married there and her daughter, we had sponsored, and then she got her parents here.

Interviewer- how did your brothers come here?

Nazar- I applied for them.

Interviewer- was it easy to apply for one's family then?

Nazar- yes, it was easy.

Interviewer- how long did it usually take?

Nazar- then, in about 6 months they approved the application, sometimes even in a month. Then from there, the medical was sought. If the person passed in their medical the first time, they came quickly, otherwise it took a while.

Interviewer- what did the time depend on? Why did it sometimes take 6 months versus 1 month?

Nazar- it depended on the circumstances. Let's say two of us applied at the same time, I have the finances –money in the bank, and the other doesn't. My letter will come out faster than the other's. they would say to him that he doesn't have enough money to support the person who are sponsoring.

Interviewer- how much money did you need in the bank?

Nazar- about \$1000 in the bank

Interviewer- did a lot of families come then?

Nazar- no, very few families. Our quota for Indian people was about 350 people per year. They were going to let max 350 people come here. Then slowly the quota increased and from '69, people started coming here as visitors.

Interviewer- so once they were here as visitors, they were able to apply for permanent stay?

Nazar- they applied as soon as they got here and some of them were seen immediately, their medical papers were checked and some were told they didn't pass so they stayed as visitors.

Interviewer- did you need \$1000 for one person or a family?

Nazar- for one person, if there was a family then you needed more.

Interviewer- so like when you sponsored your brothers, you needed \$2000?

Nazar- no, I sponsored one of my brothers and I needed to have \$1000 in my bank account. Because he is single, but if was married then I would need depending on how many family members they are.

Interviewer- if they were married, you were able to sponsor their kids as well?

Nazar- plus, I also needed a work letter stating where I worked and my wages. They would calculate my earnings and check my bank account, including the interest. Immigration figured out everything. If I work at \$1.50 an hour and I worked 80 hours in two weeks, then I would make \$120. In one month, it comes to \$240. Then they would think that in that \$240, I need to eat and also the ones I sponsor. Then they checked how much was in my bank account,

including interest. They checked like that.

Interviewer- let's say you need \$1000 in your bank account, and you borrowed some money from your friends and put in your bank account. Did they ask where all the money came from in your bank account?

Nazar- no they didn't ask. They just needed to see the \$1000 in the bank, it didn't matter if I deposited it or borrowed it from someone. They didn't even need a letter from the bank. They just asked how much we had in the bank, or we would just show them our bank books. Then after they started asking for letters.

Interviewer- they would just ask before and that's it?

Nazar- yes, they would just ask. For my daughter, she was going to apply for her husband, so I gave her \$50 000 for her bank account. The bank gave her a letter stating that before she had this much money and now she has \$55000. They then rejected it. They said she borrowed the money and deposited it.

Interviewer- what year was that?

Nazar- that was about 20 years earlier. I don't know that exact year. It was about '82.

Interviewer- what were some of the difficulties then, what did you find hard?

Nazar- then we didn't realize the difficulties. About car, or ride because in India we never had a car available to us all the time. And we didn't have any difficulties. The only thing was the language. Like if we had to go the doctor, we were not able to communicate ourselves. Other then the doctor, we didn't need to communicate anywhere else.

Interviewer- who did you take with you when you went to the doctor?

Nazar- whoever was available that knew the language. If a lady knew, then she would go with the ladies. If a man knew, then he would go with the men. There were some that knew the language.

Interviewer- when women first came, why didn't they work? Did they have to take care of the children?

Nazar- no there was no work. The first thing was that nobody had a car so once here, they would not ask for work. Then there were a couple of ladies from Abbotsford who went to work, and people would talk to them on the phone and they would tell others that they worked. Then ladies from mission started coming for work. There were no other jobs besides picking berries. There were other jobs, but our Indian people didn't do them, such as cleaning, or in stores. Only the new ladies, or from here, or the new immigrants who were educated, only those men and women worked in stores. Before men worked in mills and women in farms, with the berries.

Interviewer- did only the Indian ladies work, or others as well?

Nazar- some white women worked too.

Interviewer- did a lot of them work?

Nazar- only a few white women worked. Like if two or five Indian women work, then one or two white women worked. The small children, like a school boy or girl, they helped pick berries when the berry season came.

Interviewer- regarding the language problem, did you learn it yourself or go somewhere and learn it ?

Nazar- I went to school in India, upto grade 7. There English was poorly taught. I was able to read the letters but not able to understand. I knew some words such as 'go', 'come', 'back', simple words like these. 'yes', 'no'. but if I had to say for example ' I want to go to Vancouver' or 'I want to get someone from Vancouver', I was not able to say them. When I worked at the mill, there were white men there, and talking to them or listening to them speak I learnt some of the language. Or I would watch tv or learn from the kids speaking. I learnt like that.

Interviewer- if you didn't know English, then how did you talk at work?

Nazar- in Punjabi with the Indians. I worked on the chain and in front of me there was an Indian. There were 7-8 of us and we all talked in Punjabi to each other.

Interviewer- then the Indians all stayed together at work?

Nazar- yes as work. The white men were in the mill. The men that worked in the mill, they knew English a little bit. I worked for 3.5 years at Harman's mill. In that time, I only learned two or three words. Then when I began working in the white mill, I learnt "day by day". That was because when I had to talk to or call someone, they had to understand what I wanted or what I said, so this way we slowly understood each other.

Interviewer- they just spoke English right?

Nazar- yes, they spoke in English. I knew what a 'nail' was yet when I worked with the millwrights, they all were white and I was the only one that was Indian, so I always looked in the same direction when he spoke. They were talking about the big nails and referring to them as 'spikes' so when they asked me to go get a spike, I just looked around and eyed the spikes. When I brought it over, I learnt a new word, I then knew that the big nails are called spikes. This way, slowly I learnt.

Interviewer- did your wife also learn English?

Nazar- she also did this way. She only knows a little.

Interviewer- she learnt from you and the kids?

Nazar- from the kids, watching tv. She speaks little but if watching the news, she understands it.

Interviewer- the three of you lived together, was it house in which you lived at the mill?

Nazar- yes a house, a small one bedroom house.

Interviewer- after working there for 3.5 years, you went to another mill, a white mill. Where did you live then?

Nazar- then we came to the town, and lived in someone's basement.

Interviewer- were they Indian?

Nazar- yes.

Interviewer- how much was the rent?

Nazar- \$60 in the town. I didn't pay for utilities there either, my heat and electricity was included.

Interviewer- how many bedrooms?

Nazar- two bedrooms

Interviewer- do you remember the names of the people with whom you lived?

Nazar- his name was Pooran Singh Gill. He was the councilor Moe's grandfather.

Interviewer- did you get a job in the white mill easily?

Nazar- yes, my friend worked there. I had asked to find work for me at the mill and he asked. There was a need so I got hired.

Interviewer- what was the name of the mill?

Nazar- **Barnack** Lumbar mill.

Interviewer- where their starting wages the same?

Nazar- no they had union wages. When I started work there after 3.5 years, it was about \$2.75-2.76 per hour. Then, every two years the wages increased, due to union wages.

Interviewer- when you left the other mill, what were your wages there?

Nazar- my wages were \$1.95 there when I left work.

Interviewer- and was that union?

NAZAR- no

Interviewer- did you work somewhere else, or just the mill?

Nazar- after the Barnck mill, there was a another mill under the same company so they closed the mill down in 1992. Due to me having seniority, I got a job in the other mill under the same company, that mill was named Bay lumber.

Interviewer- where was it?

Nazar- in Pitt Middow

Interviewer- did you have a car then?

Nazar- yes I had a car then

Interviewer- what year did you get it?

Nazar- I bought it Nazar '69.

Interviewer- do you remember what kind of car it was?

Nazar- Valiant.

Interviewer- how much did it cost?

Nazar- \$1600

Interviewer- did many other people have cars as well?

Nazar- no only some people did.

Interviewer- was gas cheap then?

Nazar- then, gas cost \$0.39 a gallon. Then when it converted over to liters, it was \$0.20. now it's \$1.31. but now wages are also up.

Interviewer- your wages were \$2.75 then. Grocery must have been cheap then?

Nazar- yes, very cheap

Interviewer- do you remember how much things cost?

Nazar- the single milk cartons, 1L, used to cost \$0.23. Eggs were \$0.49 a dozen. Flour cost about \$3.00 per bag. Lettuce cost \$0.09 each. Butter \$0.49 per pound.

Interviewer- were they western stores?

Nazar- yes. Safeway. The Indian food was available in Vancouver.

Interviewer- after how long did you go there?

Nazar- a year after, if we got a ride.

Interviewer- on Main street?

Nazar- no. on Clarke and Hastings.

Interviewer- do you remember the name of the store where you used to go?

Nazar- the name...no I don't remember. They weren't white, they were Portuguese.

Interviewer- and they sold Indian food?

Nazar- Indian daals and masalas. Everything that we eat, Indian pickle, everything was available there.

Interviewer- and you went once a year?

Nazar- in the year, if we got a ride, like someone was going that way then we would go with them and get what was needed.

Interviewer- you probably had to get quite a bit all together.

Nazar- we had a small family. If we got 10 pounds of daal, then we would still get some vegetables from here and make others.

Interviewer- then also for lunch. Did you take roti for lunch as well?

Nazar- for lunch, I ate at home when I worked at the mill. Then in Barnck's mill, I took roti for a while. Then I started taking bread after 2-3 years, sandwich.

Interviewer- so you had to warm up your roti there?

Nazar- if there was a heater on nearby, then we would just put the lunch kit on top of the heater to get warm, otherwise we would just eat them like that.

Interviewer- do you have any old papers or pictures?

Nazar- I might have some old photographs.

Interviewer- when you first came, like your passport or first ticket.

Nazar- they took my old passport when I got my Canadian passport.

Interviewer- do you have anything that you might have brought with you the first time you came? What did you bring with you when you first came?

Nazar- I didn't have any money there so I brought only what was necessary. Like one suit, the one I wore, and a couple of shirts. And the shoes I wore. My daughter only had what she was wearing.

Interviewer- you didn't bring anything with you?

Nazar- no, not much. Because we didn't have much money there either. We thought we would make some here.

Interviewer- so you didn't bring a suitcase?

Nazar- no, we had a suitcase. In it we had a blanket because people here told us to bring our own blankets. It was cold here in the houses. Now we have insulation but when I stayed in the mill, there was no insulation. If the blanket was good, we stayed warm at night.

Interviewer- were you surprise how cold it was here?

Nazar- who ever went from here to India, they told everyone how cold it was here. They would tell everyone to make big and heavy blankets.

Interviewer- you only find out how cold it really it once you face it your self.

Nazar- did you want to come here to make money and because it provided a better life here?

Nazar- yes. My uncle was here. He used to tell us that when he came here in 1933, he returned after 20 years. The first 12 years they wanted to make enough for the airfare back to India. It was that bad here. They worked for \$0.07 an hour in a mill here.

Interviewer- when they first came?

Nazar- yes my uncle.

Interviewer-when they...

Nazar- they came for the first time in 1933. In '35, '34, '36 work was hard to find. If they did find work, then they were paid sometimes 6 cents or 7 cents an hour. Then it increased to 8 cents. The then decreased again.

Interviewer- why did they decrease it?

Nazar- because there were too many workers. Men used to try to get another one fired so he could work more.

Interviewer- so they kept everyone but just decreased the wages?

Nazar- no they, the men would say that they work harder inorder to get the other fired. It was not union. So the owner would decrease the wages instead. Then the men still did it. There was not much work available in the farms.

Interviewer- when your uncle came here, was he alone here?

Nazar- no his uncle was here. He had sponsored four of his nephews.

Interviewer- how was he your uncle?

Nazar- he was not my close uncle, second uncle.

Interviewer- what as his name?

Nazar- one was named Indar Singh Gill (Nash's father), Dilwara Singh Gill, Ganga Singh Gill, and Joginder Singh Gill. These four came together. Their uncle sponsored them. His name was...I forgot his name.

Interviewer- Indar Singh Gill sponsored you?

Nazar- yes. His name was Naranjan Singh Gill, the one who sponsored my uncle.

Interviewer- was he from Dhudike as well?

Nazar- no Nathuwala. He was a blood relative but they had moved to another pindh.

Interviewer- very few people came then right?

Nazar- yes very little.

Interviewer- if you find anything that is old...

Nazar- if I find any pictures...

Interviewer- even if your wife has anything that you brought like old blankets, clothes...

Nazar- probably not. My wife has a habit of throwing away anything extra. Even the kids clothes that they don't wear for a while. We were talking about Nash Gill earlier, his father when he came brought a steel trunk...he still has it.