

Saw Mill Worker Stories

Ang Singh Sidhu Narrative

Interview Date: January 8th, 2015

Ang Singh Sidhu was born on February 13, 1930 in the Village of Nangal Kalan, located in District Hoshiarpur, Punjab. The first person in Ang Sidhu's family to come to Canada was his grandfather who arrived in 1906 at around 25 years of age. Unfortunately, since Ang Singh's father passed away at a fairly young age in 1956, he would never see Canada. Thus, it was Ang Singh's grandfather who sponsored his grandson to come to Canada in 1955 soon after Ang had completed his University education in India in the field of history and economics. Ang Singh was 23 years old when he arrived to join his grandfather. Initially, Ang Singh's grandfather was living and working on a farm in Kelowna; however, when Ang Singh began working at his Uncle's sawmill called Mohinder Sawmill, located in Lake Cowichan, he asked his grandfather to live with him. When the Mohinder Sawmill burned down in 1956, Ang Singh then began working at the BC Forest Sawmill located in Highland nearby Duncan. The mill was large, employing approximately 300 to 400 men. According to Ang Singh, there many Punjabi men who worked at the mill as well as Caucasian men. As a result of the large amount of Punjabi men who worked there, there was even a cookhouse in which two full-time cooks worked. These two cooks were hired to make Punjabi food only, including things such as; prashad (sweet dough offerings), rotis (flatbread), daliya (oatmeal), etc. There were about 60 to 70 Punjabi men who would frequent this cookhouse, whereas the Chinese mill workers had their own cookhouses, etc., etc. According to Ang Singh, there were only 15 to 20 Punjabi families living in Victoria at the time.

Soon after arriving and working on the Island, Ang Singh was married in the year 1957. His wife, who was born in Victoria, also held a good position working in the Victoria Parliament building. After the year 1956, Ang Singh's Uncle built another sawmill located in Lake Cowichan and so Ang Singh moved there to begin working. Ang Singh's main job was to work in the boon on the logging, which would entail him to receive the different species of logs (i.e. Hemlock, Cedar, etc.) that were rolling in the lakes. There were instances even when Ang Singh fell into the water, and soon after, he began driving a small boat that could make it easier to sort out the logs. After three years of working for his Uncle, Ang Singh then moved to Victoria to work at another unionized mill but in the same position of boon logging. Ang Singh built up his seniority over time in the position in Victoria and ended up moving to the rank of supervisor where he managed the work of fifteen people under him. Ang Singh would work the standard eight hour shifts a day, earning a wage of \$1.40 per hour. Ang Singh ended up working at this same mill for many years, and didn't end up retiring until the year 1989 when he was 59 years old. By the time he retired, Ang Singh recalls his years' income coming to a total of \$40,000.00. Throughout his career in the mills, Ang Singh never worked inside the mill, he spent his entire career working on the lakes and on the boats because it was mostly a one-man job.

As the eldest out of four siblings, Ang Singh sent many of his earnings back to India so that he could support them financially to migrate to Canada. He was successful in bringing his whole family to Canada as he has no family in India.