

Ang Singh Sidhu Transcription

Interview Date: January 8th, 2015

Audio Clip 1 (Brief recording during signing of consent form)

SB: Hello Uncle Ji what is your name?

AS: My name is A-N-G Singh Sidhu.

Audio Clip 2 (Recording started immediately after consent form signed)

AS: My grandfather came to Canada in 1906, then he stay whole life in Canada. He never go back.

SB: How old was your grandfather when he came here to Canada?

AS: I guess around 25-26.

SB: About what year did he come here?

AS: 1906. Then he never go back. My father died 1956. He never came to Canada. When I was around 23 years old, graduated from university. Then he bring me here.

SB: In what year was this?

AS: I came in 1955.

SB: Did you come here on point class or family class or...?

AS: That was a sponsored class.

AS: I came in 1955 and there was our village person, he was like an uncle working in sawmill. I go there. My grandfather was living in Kelowna. In the farm. He was doing some farm work. I bring him down in here then I stay in Lake Cowichan with uncle's mill. When the mill burned down in 1956...

SB: Do you remember the name of that sawmill?

AS: Mohinder Sawmill.

SB: Mohinder sawmill. Ok.

AS: Then after that in 1956 I start to work in Hugo sawmill.

SB: Was that in Kelowna?

AS: No, no here. On Highland. Lake Cowichan near Duncan

SB: Would that mill still exist?

AS: It's closed now but it ran for many years. It was very old.

SB: Was it a big mill?

AS: Very big.

SB: Was it sawmill?

AS: 300-400 used to work there. That's so big, yeah.

SB: At that time were there a lot of our men in that mill?

AS: At that mill there were a lot of our men.

SB: Were there gorey too?

AS: There were gorey too, there were apney too. There was a cookhouse. Two people cooked full-time.

SB: The food--

AS: --They made our food. They made all of our food. Prashad, Roti, dhaliyah. Everything that there is. Everything.

SB: What year was this? About?

AS: '56. Before '56. There were so many people. Its name was BC Forest Sawmill.

SB: In the cook house were there a lot of apney?

AS: The cook house was for apney.

SB: How many men were there total in the cookhouse?

AS: Around 300 people. The Chinese cook house was different, our cook house was different.

SB: So those 300 men were apney men?

AS: No. 300 was gorey, Chinese, and apney together. Total was that.

SB: In that amount, about how many were apney?

AS: Around 60-70 people. Mostly people at that time only stayed in Canada for 5 years then they go back. Not too many families. When I came 15-20 families in Victoria.

SB: Uncle Ji, was your family with you?

AS: No. I married in 1957 here in Victoria. My wife was born in Victoria. My children were born in Victoria. They are all doctors, dentists, all that. Engineers, all that. I spent all my energy to put all of them in university. Now they are all well off.

SB: Congratulations, that's really good.

AS: Then after '56 our uncle village person he make sawmill in Lake Cowichan and he said you can come in here. Then I leave the work at Hugo sawmill and start to work there at uncle's mill.

SB: Uncle ji, do you remember what was your job was in this mill?

AS: My job was I mostly worked in the boom. On the logging.

SB: What was that?

AS: The logs we would receive in the water. In the Lake.

SB: Did people ever fall in to the water?

AS: Oh yeah, while working. After that I started to drive the boat. Small boat that sorted out the logs. After that...

SB: How much time did you spend at that mill?

AS: That mill never changed. Three years I worked there. After that I come in Victoria. In the same boom I was driving small boat. After that I got seniority and I was in charge of all that. 15 people were under me. They were working. Some were sorting, this and that. Here in Victoria I came in 1957. Three years I worked in that sawmill and I come back Friday in day like that.

SB: What shifts would you take? Day shifts? 8 hour shifts?

AS: 8 hour shifts. That time when I came down, wages were \$1.40.

SB: When you finished working, do you remember what your wage was at the time of leaving?

AS: \$1.40.

SB: That's the wage you received when you started working at the mill. Do you remember what you were making when you left the mill?

AS: I- I don't...

SB: Do you remember what year you left [the mill work]?

AS: '89.

SB: '89?

AS: The only thing is, I only remember. In that last statement of that year I make \$40,000. Because I was in charge compared to the other men. That's all.

SB: Ok. Did you work in a unionized mill?

AS: Yes, union.

SB: From the beginning?

AS: Union was so strong. Anyone working in sawmills they had to join the union. When I retired, I was 59 years old. Then I retired.

SB: In 1989?

AS: In '89. They offer me job in Vancouver. I was going to go there but the children said you don't need to work. Since then I have been retired. July 1, 1989.

SB: Uncle ji, what did you find hard about working in the sawmill?

AS: You know I didn't work inside too much. All my life I was on the boat in the ocean. On the logs, in the boat.

SB: Were there any accidents that happened with men on boats in the water?

AS: No, The job on the boat is a one-man job. They have sorting of different species on the water. Some Hemlock, some Cedar...like that.

SB: What was the state of your health while working in the mill? A lot of men developed asthma...

AS: Asthma only happened to men working in the mill. I was in the fresh air the whole time.

SB: Do you remember your first memory of working in the mill? Do you remember?

AS: I was the eldest. I have 4 more brothers. I tried to bring my other brothers here. He was my younger one. He's 17 years younger than me. All my sisters. I bring them all here. I worked so hard. I saved all my money and I brought my whole family here. Nobody in India. All my children are here.

SBs: That's all...actually did Canada seem to you when you came here?

AS: Canada? I not have much problem with that. My wife was born in here. She worked in the government, Parliament building. My wife make...at that time wages were so small. Sawmill is the highest wages. But provincial government she make \$120 a month. Once a month they cut a cheque. Mills they get every two weeks.

SB: When you first came to Canada from India, did it seem strange to you?

AS: I was a grownup. I had gone to university. I knew all...everything. I was not ignorant. All that time I spent in school, colleges...I had more knowledge. So that was not my problem.

SB: What did you study in university?

AS: In my time, the British time, I did learn Punjabi too much. I learned that myself. The alphabet. There was no Urdu and Farsi. I took History and Economics.

SB: I'm done. But uncle there are a few questions from the beginning I forgot to ask. I'll ask again. Uncle Ji what is your name?

AS: Ang Singh Sidhu.

SB: What is your date of birth and place of birth?

AS: Village Nangal Kalan, District Hoshiarpur. Punjab, India.

SB: OK. What is your date of birth?

AS: Feb 13, 30.

SB: 1930?

AS: [nods yes]

SB: What year did you come to Canada?

AS: 1955.

SB: And you said you had been sponsored through your family. Brother, father...who ended up sponsoring you?

AS: Only my grandfather sponsored me.

SB: And now are you a Canadian citizen?

AS: Yes since long, long time.

SB: Uncle Ji was that a union mill?

AS: Yes, union mill.

SB: Ok. That's all.