

Beant Singh Sidhu Transcription

Interview Date: November 21st, 2014

SB: Uncle Ji what is your name? Full name.

BS: Beant Singh Sidhu.

SB: Your birth...what is your date of birth?

BS: 1st November, 1940.

SB: And where?

BS: I was born in Sukh Anand but by birth I am Canadian. My father was Canadian citizen.

SB: Ok. So when did you come to Canada?

BS: In 1964, I came on 2nd February.

SB: Ok. Right now, what is your immigration status? Now.

BS: Citizen.

SB: You're a Canadian citizen? JG: Immigrate. My brother sponsored me.

BS: Yes.

SB: Ok when you came here what was your immigration status? Like before there used to be family class—

BS: No, I got Canadian citizenship and passport right there.

SB: Ok. Before...I think you already answered this question but where did you live before you came to Canada?

BS: Suk Anand.

SB: Ok. Did you do some work there before coming to Canada?

BS: [Shakes head no]

SB: Ok. Did you used to work in the mill?

BS: Yes in 1964 there was a Rainier Mill near Vancouver. There I worked.

SB: Did you remember the approximate date? In what year that was?

BS: I started in February 1964 and after working two years and three months I quit. In 1966 I went back to India.

SB: 1966 ok. And how did you find the work at Rainier Mill?

BS: My uncle was here in 1932 he found it for me.

SB: What kind of mill was this? Sawmill? Shake and Shingle?

BS: No it was sawmill. It was a very big mill. There were twenty men working on the green chain. It was a really large mill. No, in 1966 I went back to India then in 1971 I came back. Then I worked in a pulp mill.

SB: Ok. Do you remember the name of the pulp mill?

BS: McMillan. It was a very big mill 250 men worked in the mill.

SB: Do you have any first memories of working in the mill?

BS: In the first days it was very hard. You don't know how to do the work. In pulp mills the work was very simple but I had that feeling that I had never had to work before in my life and I felt like dying. It's true. It wasn't that hard but I had never worked before. I did not do any work in India up until the age of 23.

SB: Did you get used to it?

BS: Yes in two months I was well set.

SB: Ok. Ummm... How was life then for men that worked in the mills?

BS: The best job there was saw mill. All the other jobs were \$1, \$2. The real job at that time was sawmill. Good wages, it was about \$2.09 and when I stopped it was about 16. Today it would be \$28, \$29.

SB: The men that worked in the mills, were they usually our men, gorey or...

BS: No, mixed. There were some mills where East Indians were 10% and 90% gorey. But in some 20%, some 30%. Where one Indian man would start, another would start then another would start. They need work. Our men were strong workers.

SB: When you started in 1964 at Rainier Mill, at that time how many of our men were there in the mill?

BS: About 15 men.

SB: How many men were there total?

BS: There were about 400 men.

SB: Ok so when you came back in 1971 to work in the pulp mill, did anything change with the amount of our men working?

BS: No. Men were there according to knowledge, hard work. If you went to one mill, two mills, three mills...sometimes they would hire old workers if they had a link with the foreman. They would say there's a guy from India you should hire him.

SB: So there was no increase or decrease in the amount of our men working in the mills when you came back from India the second time?

BS: No the first time there were few and then there were lots. There was no place that there weren't 5-10 of our men working. Wherever our men would start working they would make friendships with foremen and after giving alcohol and things they would take a man to work there and the foreman would say bring him tomorrow.

SB: Ok. Ummm. When you worked in the mill...I think you already answered a bit of this but what did you find hard? What were the challenges?

BS: Hard was nothing but a little our men don't mix and aren't happy. If a new man would start they would say he should stop another one of our men will come. Those few men didn't fully work hard. But there were no problems. The gorey men didn't hate us that much. In outside mills there was a problem. Near Prince George...fights. Here, all the mills in B.C. there was no problem. Maybe in the early mills there was. 50-60 years before. But not now.

SB: That's good. Ummm when did you leave mill work?

BS: The first time I left it in 1964 and left for India after three months. And in paper pulp mill I left in 1979.

SB: What was the reason for leaving?

BS: I came to Abbotsford and my friend had farms and they said you make ten, ten dollars there. I had four children and they said you can make that much money in 5 months. So then I started working there. I got 10 plots, then 20, then 30...then it got developed.

SB: When you worked at the saw mill, how did you find Canada?

BS: The best thing about sawmill, you had good salary. The work was heavier in some mills, lighter in others. But it was the best job at the time. Second the country wasn't that developed.

SB: That's all my questions are done.