

Dogar Singh Bains Transcription
Interview Date: February 10th, 2015

MB: What is your name?

DB: Dogar Singh Bains

MB: Okay and when were you born?

DB: 1930, October.

MB: Where were you born?

DB: India. Pind Palahi.

MB: District?

DB: Kapurthala.

MB: And when did you come to Canada?

DB: 1959, July 22nd.

MB: How old were you? Around 19-20. Okay so what were you doing in India before coming here? Did you do any studies?

DB: I mostly did farming, not much education.

MB: Till how much did you study then?

DB: Till the 3rd or 4th grade.

MB: Okay. And so you were doing farming with your father then?

DB: Yes, yes.

KS: So with what mindset did you feel like wanting to come to Canada?

DB: Our family. it has been 100 years. First my Baba's brother came here in 1906.

KS: What is his name?

DB: Then my Chacha Ji came in 1932 and then he sponsored me so then I came.

MB: Where were they living?

DB: Here in Victoria... We used to live on Mark Street.

KS: What was your Dada Ji's name?

DB: Rattan Singh.

MB: So you came on the basis of sponsorship.

DB: Yes there was a quota back then for nephews. Around 150 men came then. That was the quota number. Then the visitors began coming and the number of people started increasing. At first, there were very few people coming.

KS: Were you the only one in your family who came by the quota?

DB: Yes, I was alone.

KS: What about the rest of your family?

DB: They came later.

KS: Did you sponsor them?

DB: Yes. I didn't come as a visitor I came as an immigrant through the quota system.

MB: So you were unmarried when you came?

DB: No, I had gotten married in India.

MB: When did you get married?

DB: I was around 17 years old when I got married. Because in India first..

KS: Did you not find it okay to bring your wife and kids with you then?

DB: No. I had 2 small kids then. And 1 was born after my leave. After 7 years I sent for my family.

KS: You sponsored them. Why didn't you bring them with you?

DB: We couldn't back then.

KS: It wasn't allowed, okay.

MB: So what did you do when you came here?

DB: I wasn't able to find work at first. But I have just been a mill worker.

MB: Was your Chacha Ji also working in the mill?

DB: Yes, he had.

MB: Did you know prior to coming to Canada that you'd be working in the mill or did you come to know upon your arrival?

DB: No, I had no idea. I knew nothing about working in the mills and what I'd be doing.

MB: So after how long did you find work in the mill?

DB: Off and on... I went to Vancouver and I worked in the farms for a while too because I couldn't find work. Our people weren't doing many other jobs – either they were driving trucks or they were mill workers, the few that were here. Then after around 4 years I found steady work in the mill. In the meantime, I was working off and on.

MB: What were the farms like that you worked in?

DB: Just like the farms you see now.

KS: Did you first work in the mill or did you first work in the farms?

DB: I first worked in the farms.

KS: In Vancouver.

DB: No, here. Off and on, I even worked in the mill when I'd get shifts for a day or two. And in between I'd go to the farms. But a majority of my work was in the mills.

KS: What work did you like better – working in the farms or working in the mills?

DB: Working in the farms was less money and it was union pay. And slowly after a while I got steady work and...

MB: So the work at the mill must've been quite heavy, right.

DB: The work in the mill was really heavy.

MB: How did you find that to be since you had been doing agricultural work for a while?

DB: I was young and I was able to do what I needed to do.

KS: Do you remember the names of the mills in which you first worked in?

DB: Yes, I remember. Plumper Bay Sawmill used to be here in Victoria. And then there was a Hillcrest Masachi Mill out by Duncan – I worked just a little while there. And then I worked at Sook sawmill – it is a town just out of there. I worked a long time there - 26 years.

MB: So that was where you were getting your steady work.

DB: Yes, at Plumper Bay I did 3 years and I worked in Vancouver for a year, as well as a year at Masachi. But I did many of my years at Sook.

MB: How far is Sook from here?

DB: Sook is about 22 miles from here.

MB: Did you have your own car?

DB: We lived here by the Gurdwara and we used to go in our own cars.

MB: By carpooling together?

DB: Yes. Sometimes we'd go together. If there was one ship then we'd go together or someone else would go in the car.

KS: What was the first job you did in the mill?

DB: On the green chain. Where you pull the lumber, like this table right here. Then I worked on the planer feeder and I'd feed the machines, which go quite fast. Then I did the trim saw. And I also did the spare man. The spare man is the one who helps the foreman and does predictions. Predictions like you know.

MB: So your seniority must've built up over time.

DB: Yes, it kept going up.

MB: So what was your last position there?

DB: That spare man. The one who'd help around. Like if the chains get plugged in the mill, just to ensure that work flows smoothly.

KS: In all these years did you become a supervisor or not?

DB: No.

KS: On purpose or?

DB: No, no. If the supervisor needs men..

KS: Do you need a little more education for it? You need training.

DB: You need training.

MB: Did you also do grading? Did you have a grading ticket?

DB: No, I did not have a grader ticket but I did do all the other work.

MB: Were mostly the supervisors gorey or apney?

DB: The supervisors were gorey.

MB: Was there any reason behind that for the gorey mostly being supervisors?

DB: No, we would all get along with each other just fine. Just like brothers, the crew had no difference between one another.

MB: So everyone was working together, like brothers, you said.

KS: Were the mills mostly of gorey or apney?

DB: Plumper Bay was apney. And the supervisors there were apney and gorey, but that was an apna mill.

KS: At what salary did you begin with?

DB: When I first came in '59, there was a stack for juniors. It was \$2 for the hour. And then slowly after a year or two's contract, the wages would increase.

KS: And when you retired what was it then?

DB: Our mill got bankrupt and some people had a co-op running on their own.

KS: What was that mill?

DB: Sook. Then after a while it closed down. And I don't even remember... in '90 or '80 something, it closed.

MB: So you retired after that?

DB: I took the package to retire at 55 years. I wasn't applicable to get old age pension or the other one so I got the package for the junior one. It was my choice which one I wanted, whether I wanted the long-run one or the shorter one. So our pensions are running now.

KS: So you got the package to retire at 55.

DB: Yes.

MB: And you didn't work again after that.

DB: No. Then I got our own farm.

MB: Oh, okay, when was that?

DB: In '92. It's by the ferry, that's where we live now.

MB: What kind of farm is it? Like the acres.

DB: It's not a very big farm. And we harvest strawberries. And then my son...please turn this off I don't want to say it.

MB: Okay.

KS: The gorey.

DB: There were very few apney.

KS: Who was more in the mill?

DB: There were more gorey in the mills. According to percentage, there was a lot more.

KS: Were there more like Chinese and Japanese?

DB: Yes. There were few Japanese but there were indeed Chinese. There were other Red Indians too.

KS: What was your relationship with them?

DB: Everyone was good with one another. There was no difference.

MB: So since you came Uncle, did you live with your Chacha Ji?

DB: Yes, with my Chacha.

MB: So you lived in a house.

DB: Yes.

MB: So in the times that you've worked, you've never had to live in a bunkhouse then?

DB: I did live in a bunkhouse when I worked at Masachi Lake for a little while.

MB: Okay, for how long was that?

DB: I believe I worked just a year there.

MB: So you stayed a whole year there.

DB: Yes. I'd stay five days there and then on the weekends I'd come back to my Chacha Ji.

MB: Okay. Tell us a little bit about your experience living there.

DB: It was very good, very good. And the company there was Chinese. That company built us a Gurdwara there. It was a very good company.

KS: In what area?

DB: Masachi Lake. Hillcrest was the company. The lumber mill was quite powerful.

KS: The Company built the apney a Gurdwara?

DB: They built the apney a Gurdwara and also something for the Chinese. The people paid for that a little but the company would keep the Gurdwara Granthi in work. It was a gora's company. The Granthi would do seva and work in the Gurdwara as well.

MB: So was your bunkhouse separate from the gora's then?

DB: Yes.

MB: How many were there?

DB: Like there would be one here and the other would be on the opposite side of the road. They'd all be separate. We'd have our own apna cook and the Chinese would have their own cook.

MB: How many apney lived in one bunkhouse together?

DB: There were quite a lot of people. There were 300 men employed in the mill. And some men would go home to their families.

KS: One bunkhouse would have 300 people living in it?

DB: No, not all of them. There were about ... 40 men for sure.

MB: So you had your cook, yes. And he made just Punjabi food.

DB: Punjabi, yes. Our apna food.

MB: So where did the groceries come from?

DB: From the stores, like now. We had our director and he'd go out and bring the food. Just like the same situation in our families right now.

KS: In the cookhouse there was a designated director to bring the groceries.

DB: Yes. Like he'd send out a few men out to the store to get the things he needed and keep making it. Like one day this would be made and the next day something else.

KS: Tell us a little bit about what you ate for your meals like in your lunch and dinner and breakfast.

DB: For breakfast there would be things like Saviyan or Kheer. And you know, the work was heavy, so our apney men would eat ghee (ghee) a lot.

KS: Was it butter or could you get our Indian desi ghee?

DB: Just the regular butter. And so we'd eat a good portion of kheer in the morning and just keep on pulling the lumber! **Laughs** When it was really hot on the green chain we'd wipe the sweat off our foreheads like this (uses forearms to wipe). We'd be on the green chain with our gloves on, working away. Our clothes could have been wringed out with all the sweat. It was hard work.

MB: You did such heavy and hard work, did it have any effect on your overall health?

DB: My health remained good all the time. See, I was on the MS Plan, but I had never once gone to the doctor. Then... I had asthma because of sealer and I had to go to the doctor.

KS: Asthma from what?

DB: Sealer. From the logs. It is quite awful and has the sweet scent of honeydew. But then that mill stalled and so it stopped ... My lungs that were damaged got plugged I guess.

KS: Did you take any medication or no?

DB: The doctor had given me one then, but ... the mill stalled and so it cleaned out on it's own basically.

KS: After that you never had any problems then?

DB: No, but I do take medicine to treat my blood pressure now.

KS: Did the blood pressure happen after your retired?

DB: It happened after the mill stalled. We have rent property and clean houses. And something infected me and so my son said it might be a bad thing, or infected with some drug. And the doctor said, "his blood is so high, how is he even walking around?" I said I hadn't seen a doctor in 12 years and the doctor that I did have had left the practice as well. So the doctor asked who my doctor was and I said nobody! I had one but I just never went to him. And then the doctor had be on medication. Before that I had never gone to a doctor.

KS: Have any of your kids ever worked in the mill? How many kids do you have?

DB: I have two boys.

KS: And any daughter?

DB: I have 3 daughters.

KS: Have any of them worked in the mill after you?

DB: No, no. One daughter is a tax collection officer and two are working in medical plants. All the children are educated and.

KS: Did you feel the need to educate them so they wouldn't have to work in the mill?

DB: No, it wasn't like that. The circumstances then were different and the circumstances now have changed. And all our children were fine.

KS: They were good. You said one became a doctor.

MB: And when did everyone come here? You said you sponsored your wife and kids.

DB: 2 children were born here and 3 were born in India.

KS: In what year did the children come?

DB: They came in '67.

KS: Did your wife also work after coming here?

DB: No, she didn't work, she looked after the kids.

MB: Your wife may have been a little shocked though by coming to a new country though, right?

DB: No, there wasn't much shock. We had a house settled and everything so there wasn't any problem like that. It wasn't anything like that.

MB: Were you all in the same house of your Chacha Ji's?

DB: No, we had gotten our own house by then.

MB: When did you get that?

DB: I got that in '65.

MB: Your own house.

DB: Yes.

MB: Do you remember how much that house was in that time?

DB: It was \$7,500.

MB: Wow, was it brand new?

DB: No, it wasn't brand new but it was less than 20 years old.

MB: Yes, so then you had settled in that new house of yours when your family came.

KS: And did you change your houses after that?

DB: We moved 2-3 times, yes.

KS: And how did you think the economy was then? Was your spending open?

DB: It was all good.

KS: So there was open spending.

DB: Open spending.

KS: How did people think of mill workers back then?

DB: Everyone lived quite happily. Everyone worked together happily.

KS: How many hours would you work in a day's shift?

DB: 8 hours.

KS: What would you do after coming home? And meeting people?

DB: I have done work on roofs as well and sometimes farming on the weekend.

MB: Mhm, extra work.

DB: Extra.

KS: Well then how did you spend time with your kids if you were doing extra work all the time?

DB: Just so. We didn't have our kids in any games or teams much. They were certainly educated and going to school and eating well all the time, though. Like now, kids are in hockey teams and all that. We didn't have them in that stuff, but we hardly knew about it either.

KS: So then what were you kids doing in their free time?

DB: They were playing. They'd play with the neighborhood kids.

KS: And how would you celebrate any major event like a wedding?

DB: Weddings were quite simple. There weren't major couple parties or anything like that. You'd go to the Gurdwara, see the people you were close with, and that was it. There wasn't much of the partying or anything like that.

KS: What kinds of events were you celebrating then? Vaisakhi, Diwali?

DB: Vaisakhi was celebrated here in Victoria. And the Baba Mela, or whatever you call it

KS: Jor Mela?

DB: Yeah, that was held in Vancouver. And Independence Day was in Hillcrest, where I said the mill was. And there were 4 Gurdwaras, this Khalsa Diwan Society, Khalsa Diwan Society in Vancouver, Sukh Sagar, and Abbotsford. There were 4 paatis and if one was here, they'd come here and if one was there, they'd go there. Vaisakhi was here and everyone would come together and celebrate together. It was voluntary – even the musicians for the Vaja's wouldn't want any money, and thus nobody would give it. Everyone would work together and everyone was quite happy.

MB: Did you ever send money back to India Uncle?

DB: Yes, I sent money back to my parents in India.

MB: Did you not sponsor them and send for them to come here?

DB: They said they didn't want to come here. The old man said he didn't want to come. He said, "I'm old now what am I going to do in a new country? I'm a respected landowner, why should I go?" **Laughs**

KS: And what did you wear then? Kurtas and pajamas or? What did your wife wear?

DB: She has been wearing our traditional Indian clothes.

KS: Did anyone say anything to her when she went out wearing a suit?

DB: No, nobody would say anything.

KS: And what would you wear?

DB: Just what the average man wears now.

KS: A tie?

DB: No, no. What is a mill worker going to do with a tie?

MB: So did your wife ever wear dresses?

DB: No. Why would a mill worker wear a tie when he's already dripping in sweat?!

KS: When you'd go anywhere like the Gurdwara

DB: Then you could wear what you want and dress up.

KS: And do you have any other memory or story you'd like to tell us of when you were working in the mill?

DB: I have nothing else.

KS: And special memory you may have upon remembering.

DB: No, I'm good as I am. As him (points at man) he must know a lot.

MB: We have already asked him. Can you tell me a little bit about what the advantages were of working in a mill then? Since you were in a union one.

DB: The advantages were there. But nobody was taking advantage of those things like they are now. Like if my hip is hurting. The Apney men weren't taking advantage of their benefits on purpose. Now everyone does it.

KS: Nobody was taking sick leaves on purpose.

DB: No. But we see and know that the children now just don't want to work. The elderly men would tell us that even if we were sick to just drink some ghee in milk and we'd feel better.

KS: Were you drinking it like that then? Ghee and milk.

DB: Yes, I had been.

KS: When did you obtain your citizenship status then?

DB: I don't remember.

KS: Around 4-5 years later?

DB: I'd say 10 years. I don't remember. It was around when I went back to India.

KS: Okay, that's all.

DB: I got it around '70.

KS: Yes, so you came 1959 and got it in the '70's.

DB: Yes. I don't remember fully.

MB: So you were saying that when your kids came they were seven years old. Your two boys.

DB: One daughter was eleven and the other was 9 and one was 6 years old.

MB: Did they face any difficulties when they came here since there weren't very many apney families and children around?

DB: No. There were some families though.

MB: Were they all well acquainted with one another.

DB: Yes, since we were working together we stayed together like brothers.

KS: And do you have any photos of that time? Or any pay stub from that time?

DB: No, nobody had taken any photos when we were in the mills.

MB: Any family photos perhaps?

DB: My children might have those then.

MB: What about a passport?

DB: I have that. I've had that from the beginning.

MB: The old one?

DB: Yes.

MB: If you could bring that, it would be really great for us.

DB: I have my passport.