

Dayal Singh Gill Transcription

Interview Date: February 9th, 2015

MB: What is your name?

DG: Dyal Singh Gill.

MB: When were you born?

DG: In 1942.

MB: And where were you born?

DG: In Sunnar, District Jalandhar.

MB: And when did you come to Canada?

DG: In 65.

MB: How old were you?

DG: Around 21-22.

MB: Were you single?

DG: I was unmarried.

MB: And on what basis did you come?

DG: To get married.

MB: Okay, so she was here.

DG: Yes.

KS: Did she sponsor you?

DG: Yes.

KS: Where was she living?

DG: Here in Duncan.

KS: Was Duncan the first place you came?

DG: Yes, Duncan.

MB: Did you do any work before coming here from India?

DG: I did just the little things if help was needed.

MB: Any agricultural work?

DG: No.

MB: How much did you study?

DG: I did my BA.

MB: You completed your degree?

DG: I had to leave halfway through actually.

MB: Okay, what were you studying then?

DG: It was just arts. That kind of thing back then.

KS: What college did you go to?

DG: Phagwara. Are you also from that area?

KS: My in-laws are from that area. We'll talk about that later.

MB: Okay, so tell me a little bit. You had gotten married upon coming, but what did you do after that?

DG: I started working in the mill.

MB: Did somebody find work for you to?

DG: No, there was but I did a little bit somewhere else. I had given my name for unemployment actually.

MB: Where was your first job?

DG: It was just somewhere here but I only did about ten days there. Then I gave my name at unemployment and they told me that there was work somewhere else so I went there.

MB: Where was that?

DG: Honeymoon Bay.

MB: So where did you live in Honeymoon Bay? Some bunkhouse?

DG: No, I used to come back home to Duncan.

KS: How far is it from here?

DG: It's about 29 miles.

KS: How would you go?

DG: By car.

KS: Did you have your own?

DG: No we used to go by turn. Before we didn't have a car and we'd all give our share of the fare, but after I got my car we'd all take turns and do rotations driving there.

MB: So do you remember the name of the mill you worked at in Honeymoon Bay?

DG: Western Forest Industries.

MB: Was that union or non-union?

DG: Union.

MB: Were there more gorey there or apney?

DG: They were mostly gorey.

KS: Was it a lumber mill?

DG: A lumber mill, yes.

MB: What kind of work did you do there then?

DG: First I worked where you pull the wood. Then slowly, slowly I..

KS: What position did you reach to after slowly working?

DG: Shipping. With the production.

KS: When you started you work what were the wages then?

DG: It was \$2.40.

MB: How many years did you stay there?

DG: Around 16 years.

MB: Were you living in a house in Duncan?

DG: Yes, in a house.

MB: With your in-laws?

DG: My wife had a house.

KS: ... Do you have any memories or anything?

DG: No, not like that. Ask me the questions, only then can I answer.

KS: When you came from India.

DG: Whenever you come from India to a different place then there are going to be difficulties that come with it, of course.

MB: Tell me a little bit about those difficulties then.

DG: The work was hard. No, what I mean is, when you come from somewhere where you've never done such hard work, it is a shift where the arrangements and responsibility is all on you.

KS: It was hard physically, but were you also feeling difficulties adjusting to the society? Like the culture shock in comparison to India.

DG: No, I had family here so it wasn't like that. It wasn't anything too special. There were some things then that we've made developments on now.

KS: Yes, that's what we'd like to ask you.

DG: There weren't any programs like there are now.

MB: What kinds of programs?

DG: Like radios, television, shows, films. They're all common now here. There used to be a film every 2 months and we used to go and see that.

MB: Like Punjabi newspapers too.

KS: Was there a theatre here?

DG: No, in Lake Cowichan.

KS: Were Indian films played there?

DG: They would or we'd bring it home every other week or every 2 months and we'd see it.

MB: How many apney were here at this time?

DG: I would say in Duncan there were about 10-15 families but Lake Cowichan had more of a population.

MB: Did everyone know each other very well like a community then?

DG: Yes, like a community. Apney with one another.

MB: So tell me a little bit about what the advantages were of working in the mill that you worked at – Western Forest Industries.

DG: All the policies there like medical and benefits – if you go anywhere else, I don't know – but we had all those benefits.

KS: Were there more apney working in that mill or gorey?

DG: Gorey.

KS: How many apney were working there then.

DG: Just about 25-30 people.

KS: Was there any problem amongst one another. Or language?

DG: No, no problems. It is at first a language problem when you have an accent and have a hard time understanding things and reading things, but after 2-4 months you get used to it.

MB: You knew English though.

DG: I knew it but I had a hard time understanding it. You know when you first come and you have to communicate with the gorey.

KS: Was their behavior towards you good? Respectful?

DG: There are some people who do the unnecessary, but otherwise, it was good.

KS: Like distributing the work and putting people on different duties, was there not any difference amongst you guys?

DG: No, what I mean is that I didn't experience anything like that. Whatever I did, I continued getting work.

KS: And how was the economy? When did you get your own house then?

DG: Before I had come here my wife had bought a house.

MB: So you spent 16 years there, what about after that?

DG: Then the mill had closed down.

MB: What was the reason for that?

DG: They just closed it down. They said they didn't have any work. Like logs. There was another mill by Nanaimo in Duke Point. It was Doman's mill. Apney men.

MB: What is the spelling?

DG: D-O-M-A-N. He was a prominent businessman here.

KS: We didn't know. And what was the name of the mill?

DG: Doman Forest Industries. I think he had about 5-7 mills.

MB: So it was Apna owned then.

DG: It was a public company.

MB: So you worked there. What did you do there?

DG: I did lumber grading and things like that.

MB: Did you have your grading ticket?

DG: I had it from before. I did grading before I did shipping at Honeymoon Bay.

MB: So did they train you at Honeymoon Bay for it?

DG: You have to do a course and they have to see if they need the help, then they'll give it.

MB: Okay, and how long did you stay at Doman's mill?

DG: I stayed there and left in 2003 to retire.

MB: How many years in total did you work at that mill then?

DG: I think I worked 21 years. I did 38 years total.

MB: 38 years, wow.

KS: Out of all the years you worked at the mill, did you face any challenges or problems?

DG: No, problems. But what I mean is, you have to keep up with it when there's lots of work or less work. Other than that, there weren't any problems.

KS: With regards to your seniority, it kept on building as you continued your years there.

DG: The seniority wasn't there. They only had 3 types of jobs so you couldn't really get ahead.

MB: Were you ever a supervisor too?

DG: No, I was never a supervisor.

KS: And what about what you ate and drank?

DG: We just ate the regular East Indian food and roti.

KS: And what about your groceries?

DG: For groceries we had a store in Duncan or we'd sometimes go to Vancouver.

KS: Did you also send for anyone in your family to come?

DG: My sister came and so did my mother and father.

MB: Did they settle then?

DG: Yes.

KS: Did you sponsor them?

DG: Yes.

MB: Did you also send money back home to India?

DG: Well for our family, sometimes my mother and father would send it to their brother.

KS: Do you have anyone living in India?

DG: Well most of my family has come here and settled here. I have a Mama there. His family too is also all here.

KS: And in those times, how did you all celebrate any special occasions? Or did you?

DG: No, not really. Not as much as it is right now.

KS: You'd celebrate Christmas though.

DG: Yeah, Christmas.

KS: What about our apney Vaisakhi or Diwali?

DG: Vaisakhi and Diwali's weren't like that. There would be a program at the Victoria Gurdwara for Vaisakhi.

KS: Would you go there then?

DG: We'd go there. Then there were festivals like Canada Day and at Paldi. There used to be 6 and the population was less.

MB: You said that there were just 11-12 Punjabi families here. When your kids began going to school here then there must've been very few apney kids in the class right?

DG: When the kids began going then some families from Lake Cowichan had moved here. But otherwise, there were very few apney children.

MB: Yeah. It must've been difficult for them.

DG: It is when you have to get used to the system. My daughter had known Hindi but there was a nursery here and we had sent her there. And after that, they didn't have many English problems.

KS: Did your children have any problems at school being the apney kids?

DG: There weren't many problems. Like there is lots of bullying now. Like for my son, a few boys started teasing him. We told the principal and the principal said, "Don't you worry. You walk ahead of me and I'll follow behind you." The boy walked with him and the boys were nearing him. The principal told us that we'd never have a problem ever again.

MB: Your kids then.

DG: My daughter is in Richmond. And my son, he was a pharmacist, but he passed away.

MB: I'm sorry Uncle Ji.

KS: You had two children?

MB: So when you were here, obviously the way of dressing was different and ladies must've been wearing dresses.

DG: Ladies were wearing dresses back then.

MB: Your wife as well? Did she change a little bit too then?

DG: What I mean is there used to be dresses back then. They wore suits infrequently.

KS: Did your kids think of working in the mill as well?

DG: Well, they had gone to university and gotten an education.

MB: You got them educated. So did your wife also do some work as well Uncle?

DG: She was in the kitchen of the hospitals. There used to be a private one for girls and she used to work in that kitchen.

MB: Did your wife find it difficult being an Indian lady and working here?

DG: The ladies were working commonly then, I'd say. Things were building then.

KS: And when did you get your citizenship?

DG: I've had it since '70. 1970.

KS: After how long could you get it then?

DG: After 5 years.

KS: And did they consider you a good citizen by the work that you did in the mill?

Respectful?

DG: There used to be a commissioner and they'd make you take an oath. You'd have to read the last paragraph and they'd come to your house. There wasn't any problem back then like there is now.

KS: Was working in the mill considered to be a good job back then?

DG: Back then it was a good job. Like there wasn't all these wages issues or disparity. You'd get decent wages.

KS: It was considered a good job.

DG: It was a good job. Well I mean, if we didn't have outstanding qualifications, this was the job.

MB: And I think farming was a career as well and trucking was happening then too.

DG: Not in the early times. The farms started up later in Abbotsford.

MB: Not here in Duncan though, right?

DG: Not here, but it started later.

MB: Okay.

KS: Like construction work or other stuff?

DG: No, no, there was nothing of that sort. If you see, there was just the forestry industry. Even now in Vancouver, if there isn't much work, construction has a lot of work too.

MB: So tell us maybe a funny or memory story that you can tell us.

KS: All our questions are finished so we'd like to hear any kind of story from you.

DG: No, no I have nothing.

MB: No? What about your house then? Have you lived in that same one?

DG: No, we've moved houses several times.

MB: So tell us about the price since the prices must've been very low then.

DG: First, I think, the house that we got was \$8,000 and then the next one was \$12,000.

KS: The whole house?

MB: Brand new?

DG: No. It was about 2-3 years old. That was \$24,000. Then after that we made our own house. We sold that and made a new one in which we live in.

KS: What is the average price now for a 3-story house here?

DG: Now it depends on what kind of area you go in. They go up to \$500,000-700,000.

MB: Your house was very cheap then. The one that was \$8,000.

DG: But even \$8,000 was a lot back then!

MB: It was a lot then.

KS: How was the economy like the price of things, cheap or expensive?

DG: That is proportionately. Like whatever the thing is, it depends on your wages. Even the phone bill was just \$2-3 and the electricity bill would come to that much too.

MB: Have you done much traveling Uncle? Here in Canada?

DG: Traveling, not so much. Maybe just on the vacation days.

MB: Where have you been then?

DG: I've been to Calgary, Alberta, Edmonton and California. I've been to Palm Springs.

KS: When would you go for holidays then? Whenever the mill was shut down?

DG: Well going on holidays is something that people have been doing more popularly as of late, but back then, people wouldn't really go much. The first time we went to Disneyland was in 1981 and we went on a bus tour. We took the kids.

MB: So what about getting a break from work?

DG: I'd take my days off.

MB: Were you working 5 days in a week?

DG: 5 days.

MB: Okay.

KS: Okay, that's all there is Uncle. All our questions have been completed. Thank you.