

Gurdial S. Talhan Transcription

Interview Date: November 12th, 2014

SB: Hello Uncle Ji what is your name?

GT: Gurdial Talhan.

SB: What is your birth year and place?

GT: Birth is Dec 8, 1954 and birth place is Punjab, India.

SB: When did you immigrate to Canada?

GT: I came to Canada in March 1977.

SB: At this time what is your immigration status? Are you a landed immigrant, citizen or student?

GT: Citizen.

SB: Ok. And when you arrived in Canada what was your immigration status?

GT: We were family class.

SB: Before coming to Canada where did you live?

GT: Pind in Punjab. Talhan.

SB: Ok. Before coming to Canada did you work and where did you work?

GT: No there wasn't work. I was a student. First I studied and alongside I worked in the farm.

SB: When did you start working in the mills in Canada?

GT: 1977 start when I came.

SB: And what type of mill did you work in?

GT: Lumber mill.

SB: And how did you find work when you got here?

GT: Work then in small towns it was lumber mill there was no other work. Whatever man there was in those days went to the mill.

SB: Did you find this work from a friend or some connection...?

GT: No my daddy worked there first. But at that time a new shift started around when we arrived. After two weeks that shift started.

SB: Umm...so you didn't make the decision to work in the mill before coming to Canada? You made that decision when you came here and the new shift started?

GT: No.

SB: Ok. Did you look for other work in Canada?

GT: No, there was no need. Found work after two weeks. I think after ten days I was just on the job.

SB: What was your first memory of working at the mill? When you first started working at the mill?

GT: What memory can I tell you? Memory— well, it seemed strange. Where you were in India and where you were going to work. Totally different.

SB: Was there some culture shock of coming here from India?

GT: No, not really.

SB: What was your job at the first mill?

GT: First I started at sorter. Where lumber is sorted in the mill. Lumber comes to the mill and when it comes, the different lengths are sorted out, different 15 feet, 16 feet lumber is sorted. After 6 months then I went to plainer.

SB: Isn't that dangerous? The plainer job? What was that job?

GT: No. no. there are different types of job areas. Someone feeds the plainer, someone stamps, someone trims, someone grade, but we piled lumber. On the chain, the green chain.

SB: Do you have any stories? Of working in the mill?

GT: Stories now?

SB: How was the work? How did the supervisors treat you in the early days?

GT: Uhh when we started that work, when I especially did— I think all the people were East Indian, almost. There the mill was gora-owned but more than 80% Indian men.

SB: Was this the story for many mills at the time?

GT: Especially in small towns. The ones in the north how many towns that were there in those days. Because it was hard work very few people did this work. A lot of our people were in this work. Very few Chinese people, few Japanese people— How else can I say this? If there were people from the mainstream community, they were on the forklift, in the office, or foreman. They were in these jobs. But on the chain, lumber piling or in the mills— if there were other people then maximum 5%.

SB: So most of the mill workers were Indian?

GT: Yes.

SB: Is this still the same?

GT: Even still it is the same, there aren't many changes. There are a bit of changes in shake and shingle because when you go to big companies you get a mix. But in our mills there are mostly our people. Maximum 5% other populations.

SB: Were there difficulties of working in the mill?

GT: There were difficulties then. In the North first you had to work outside. You had only a roof above but no walls on both sides, no nothing. In the cold, even in the heat, the wind would blow. We worked in less than -50 weather.

SB: Was this near Williams Lake first?

GT: Quesnel.

SB: Oh wow. It's cold there!

GT: And— wind chill was over -60. The wind would come in from outside and the temperature was so low.

SB: I can't even stand the weather today!

GT: No after moving here we find it cold here too.

SB: Were there successes/advantages of working in the mill at the time?

GT: Advantage was this, in those days there was no problem with unemployment. Firstly, people didn't leave work because it was union work. Secondly, people only left work if they had to move or if...men were all healthy then. Very few, very rare situation where people left. But it could happen like this that some mills had harder work and people found easier work at other mills.

SB: So people changed positions within the mill but didn't leave mill work?

GT: The work was mill work. In those days. Especially in Quenel, As many people as they were, even the kids that grew up there— even then after working as a student after graduation they would work there. Yeah there are examples like this. Then people didn't want to go anywhere else. Families were together and you just had to work here. At that time people were starting to get established. In early 70s and early 80s people were still coming—lots of families. Of the men who came in 70s, their families were still back [in India] and they were coming here. In 74 75 76 77 and until 80s even the first men's families were still coming. Someone would go to school for 3 years, 4 years and after graduation in those days it was a big deal to get work in a unionized mill. It was a very big deal. All men were happy. Small towns and expenses weren't

much. Pay was little too but all people were satisfied. If we compare with today, there was no rush or burden of this payment, that payment. Then what the total pay was then that's what the bill for other things is now. TV or phone or internet put these 3 or 4 bills together and now compare to— uhh honestly tell you house payment back then was \$212 dollars. \$212 per month. And now internet and everything is over \$200 now.

SB: People have changed? Mindset has changed?

GT: Now everyone is in to luxuries. Right? Back then it was about necessities. Everyone lived the same. People lived on one level. There was only one level because everyone worked at mill. Whether people were educated or not, everyone had the same income and everyone had about the same way of living. There wasn't a lot of showing off. Who would you show off to when everyone was the same?

SB: That's true. Umm did you—the job that you had, did it help you become a Canadian citizen? A good Canadian citizen?

GT: No, about citizenship wherever you decide to live, you have to qualify yourself. You should have that quality yourself that you want to be a citizen, a good citizen. The mill or nothing else isn't going to help...That is a self-commitment. That I want to live here and to be a citizen, a good citizen. I don't think that outside things can help with that.

SB: And that's all. I don't have any other questions.