

Saw Mill Worker Stories

Jagat Singh Gill Narrative

Interview Date: November 21, 2014

Mr. Jagat Singh Gill was born in July, 1944 in the village of Sidhwan, Punjab, India in his maternal grand-parents' home. He immigrated to Canada on 29th November, 1970 by way of sponsorship through his brother. He is now a Canadian citizen. Before immigrating to Canada, he lived in village Dhudike, Punjab, India, where he was a farmer.

Jagat Singh started his first job in 1971 after coming to Canada, which was at a mill in Lou's Creek, which was 40 miles away from Kamloops. He does not remember the name of the mill. Jagat Singh worked mostly on the green chain but he also filled the rails with wood too. He worked in that mill for six months.

After six months Jagat Singh moved to Maple Ridge and found work at the Hammond Cedar Mill. It was a very big mill, and he worked there for one year and three months. Then he started getting asthma from the cedar and he left work there in 1974, and started working at another mill, called Pitt River Mill. He worked there only for three months on the green chain when he was laid off and he moved to work in Squamish for three weeks. Then he was laid off again from the Squamish mill and he found work in Campbell River. He worked there twice, being laid off twice and worked again. Then later he left that job and came to work in Mission at a private mill owned by a man of European origin. He worked in Mission for three and half years until 1983. Then he worked in Wonnock Mill in Haney on Lougheed Highway where his brother also worked. Then from there also they were laid off in 1990. His work was not steady although he stayed in the lumber industry. He says men expected to keep moving as the lumber industry had many economic hardships.

Jagat Singh obtained his first job at the mill through his friends who were living in Kamloops. His brother also worked in that mill before him. Those days there was only mill work as there was not much choice to work elsewhere and men would find work only in the mills.

In 1990 when he was laid off, Jagat Singh bought a farm and worked at his own farm. After sometime he received a call from New Westminster to work at Western Whitewood. They used to call it the 3 W's. In 2007, he was given the option either to retire or be laid off. At that time Jagat Singh was 62 years old, and he thought it was better for him to take retirement and work at his own farm.

While working in a Mill near Kamloops, Jagat Singh became ill and was diagnosed with oral cancer according to the doctors. He was shifted to Vancouver General Hospital where he was treated with radiation. He was treated and then observed for 20 years every 6 months but after that they stopped observing, because there had been no recurrence. This illness, though shocking indeed, was unrelated to Jagat Singh's work in the mill industry.

Jagat Singh worked with many Indian workers at all the mills he worked in. He did not find the work to be too hard and he says he used to be quite happy while working in the mills. Jagat Singh was 26 years old when he came to Canada and he was very strong, fit and robust.