

Joginder Singh Bassi Transcription

Interview Date: January 8th, 2015

SB: Hello Uncle Ji what is your name?

JB: My name is Joginder Bassi.

SB: Ok. What is your date of birth and place of birth?

JB: That I don't know.

S Bains: Place [of birth]?

JB: Write down India. Write down Bundala. B-U-N-D-A-L-A.

S Bains: B-U-N-D-A-L-A? Bundala. Ok. What district is that in?

JB: Jalandhar.

S Bains: What would your age be now?

JB: 82 now.

S Bains: 82. When did you come to Canada?

JB: First I came in '59 I think.

S Bains: Did you come by yourself?

JB: By myself.

S Bains: Will you tell us a little bit about how you came here?

JB: My cousin brought me here.

S Bains: Did he used to live here [Victoria]?

JB: Yes, here.

S Bains: Victoria?

JB: Yes.

S Bains: Did you come here by plane?

JB: Yes, I came by plane.

S Bains: And you got off the plane in Victoria?

JB: Vancouver and then changed to another flight.

S Bains: Who got left behind [in India]? Were you married or young?

JB: I was married. I had two kids. They are here now.

S Bains: So they are here now too. After how long [did they come here]?

JB: They came after about 7-8 years.

S Bains: Have you been living in Victoria since you arrived in Canada?

JB: No I went away and lived in Tahsis.

S Bains: How long did you live in Tahsis?

JB: I lived there a long time. 5-6 years. Maybe 7-8 years.

S Bains: Ok tell us your story now. Your cousin sent for you and you came to Canada, then what happened?

JB: Yes my cousin sent for me.

S Bains: Then?

JB: Then...nothing major happened.

S Bains: You came to Victoria, no? Then what did you do? Did you look for work?

JB: I looked for farm work.

S Bains: In the farm. For how long?

JB: 1-2 years maybe.

S Bains: Then?

JB: Then I went to Tahsis.

S Bains: Ok, was there a mill there?

JB: Wood mill. The kind that makes planks. Saw mill.

S Bains: Sawmill?

JB: Sawmill. Yes.

S Bains: Did you have other relatives working in that sawmill or did you find the job some other way?

JB: I applied for the job and then I got it.

S Bains: Ok.

SB: Uncle Ji, do you remember the name of sawmill?

JB: I don't remember now.

SB: That's ok.

JB: They used to call it Tahsis Sawmill...

S Bains: Tahsis Sawmill? And what kind of work was there Uncle? Was it quite difficult work for you or how did it seem to you?

JB: It seemed easy for trimming.

S Bains: Trim? The wood planks that would come, you would trim them?

JB: Yes, I'd trim them.

S Bains: Ok were the foremen apnay or gorey?

JB: There were more gorey (French Canadians).

S Bains: What was the atmosphere like?

JB: Ummm... the atmosphere was ok. It was ok.

S Bains: Did you live alone or with other men?

JB: Everyone lived...there was a cookhouse.

S Bains: Cookhouse?

JB: Bunkhouse. It was a bunkhouse.

S Bains: Can you tell us a little bit about that? How many men were there then?

JB: Umm about 400 men. They all lived in the cookhouse.

S Bains: That big?

JB: It [cookhouse] was very big.

S Bains: Who would make their food? (4:10)

JB: Two apnay cooks were hired there. Those two men were paid to just cook roti.

S Bains: Who paid them? Did all the men pay a little bit each?

JB: No, no. The company paid.

S Bains: What kind of food was it?

JB: The food was Western. It was very good.

S Bains: What? Do you remember what you would eat?

JB: Early in the morning there was breakfast, for lunch and dinner there was roti. Everything we received...milk, everything was very good.

S Bains: Ok. So they made roti or western food?

JB: No roti, it was Western food.

S Bains: Do you remember what?

JB: They would make chicken, they would make everything.

S Bains: Did you miss your own food or how has was it?

JB: Miss it? Well yes...but then I used to come to Victoria a lot and I'd eat roti here.

S Bains: At your relatives?

JB: My cousin was here. At his place. My Taya (Paternal uncle) was here. My baba was here too.

S Bains: Your baba ji (grandfather) was here?

JB: He was here.

S Bains: When you worked in the mill in Tahsis, approximately how much were your hourly wages?

JB: Two dollars and some cents. I don't remember.

S Bains: At that time, where was your family? You lived alone in Tahsis and your family lived in India?

JB: My family was living in India.

S Bains: Were all the men married and their families were living in India, or were there some families living out there at the time?

JB: Uhhh.... there were two or three apani families living there... there were about two or three families. One was Bikkar...one was Bikkar Sidhu I think. One other was...I don't remember now.

S Bains: So they didn't live in the cookhouse, they had their own house?

JB: They had their own trailer. No house, they had a trailer.

S Bains: The 300-400 men [that were in the bunkhouses] were they all apney?

JB: No there were gorey too. Generally, there were more gorey. Apney were only a few.

S Bains: There were few apney or few gorey?

JB: No, Apney were few.

S Bains: How many?

JB: 60 men...may be 50 altogether.

S Bains: How was the atmosphere between everyone? How did the gorey treat you?

JB: The gorey treated us really good.

S Bains: There was no tension? Nobody would bother you?

JB: No.

S Bains: How long was a work shift?

JB: 8 hours.

S Bains: Were there double shifts as well?

JB: Saturday would be overtime. You would end up working a Saturday here and there at least once a month.

S Bains: Did you learn how to make roti yourself?

JB: No.

S Bains: No?

JB: No.

S Bains: Not even up until now?

JB: Now...now even my wife is here.

S Bains: Looking back, what the atmosphere like when you first came to Canada? How did it seem to you?

JB: Back then India seemed better [to me]. Not anymore. Now, a lot has changed. Now it doesn't seem better.

S Bains: What changed? Now do you like Canada more?

JB: Now, [I like] Canada better.

S Bains: But at first you liked India more?

JB: Yes, at first India seemed better.

S Bains: How did you spend your time waiting [for your family to come to Canada]?

JB: Well, the time just passed.

S Bains: Did you send letters?

JB: We would send letters.

S Bains: To India?

JB: India. My wife would send me letters from India.

S Bains: Are you able to read and write? Were you able to write letters yourself?

JB: I would write letters myself.

S Bains: Ok. And the letters would come.

JB: Yes.

S Bains: Have you kept any letters?

JB: No, we didn't keep any of them.

S Bains: Do you have any photos of your time in Tahsis?

JB: No I don't have any with me.

S Bains: Do you have anything from that time?

JB: No, nothing.

S Bains: You didn't take care of the things? Or didn't keep them?

JB: We didn't keep anything. We didn't need any of those things so we didn't keep them.

S Bains: So after leaving Tahsis, where did you go?

JB: Then I went to Victoria.

S Bains: What work did you do there?

JB: In Victoria I worked on the farm first and then I worked in sawmill.

S Bains: Ok, here too?

JB: Here too.

S Bains: What was the atmosphere like there?

JB: It was good.

S Bains: Did you have the same job?

JB: No here it was different job.

S Bains: What was your job here?

JB: Here...it was on the belt, I don't remember what it was called.

S Bains: Ok, then how many years did you work [here]?

JB: Then, 20 years.

S Bains: In Victoria?

JB: In Victoria.

S Bains: Then what happened? Did the mill close?

JB: The mill closed.

S Bains: Were you at retirement age then or...?

JB: No I had received a package.

S Bains: Oh, a compensation package.

JB: Yes. Men who worked in union mills received a full package after the age of 55 as a pension.

S Bains: Then you retired?

JB: Yes.

S Bains: And what was the name of that mill, do you remember?

JB: At the time it closed it was called the Fletcher Challenge.

S Bains: When you started you were making around \$2 [an hour], when you retired how much were you making?

JB: 3 dollars and something...No in 89 it was about \$15 or \$16 per hour. I don't know.

S Bains: Tell me in your words what your sawmill experience was like. Was it good?

JB: It was very good.

S Bains: Tell us more.

JB: It was good.

S Bains: Did you do farm work in India before coming to Canada?

JB: Yes.

S Bains: Did you notice a difference when you came to Canada and had to work in sawmills?

JB: At first it seemed hard but now, no. It's about the same. But here there are benefits?

S Bains: Tell us about it.

JB: Here you get old age pension, there they don't. When I stopped in '89 I got a package and started receiving pension.

S Bains: So you had a good experience working in the mills?

JB: It was good.

S Bains: And the work didn't seem difficult to you?

JB: No it didn't

S Bains: You didn't develop any health problems?

JB: No.

S Bains: You stayed healthy?

JB: Yes.

S Bains: No minor accident in sawmill?

JB: No I stayed good.

SB: Uncle Ji, what is your first memory of your first day working in the mill?

JB: It seemed very hard to me. I was working on the chain.

SB: The green chain?

JB: Yes the chain...the green chain. I came and worked on it. It seemed hard then but overtime it became less hard.