

Malikiat Singh Dhaliwal Transcription

Interview Date: January 28th, 2015

MB: What is your name?

MD: Malkiat Dhaliwal.

MB: And when were you born?

MD: I was born on September 20, 1958.

MB: When did you immigrate to Canada?

MD: I came in '81. I think in December. I forget, it had been a long time.

MB: So you were about 22? How old?

MD: You can check how old I was, dear. I haven't been educated much **laughs**

MB: And on what basis did you come? Did somebody sponsor you?

MD: I came with my mother.

MB: So you came together?

MD: Yes, all three of us. My mother, my father, and I.

MB: Okay. And in what village were you living in before coming here?

MD: Bhamipura.

MB: And were you born there as well?

MD: Yes, I was born there.

MB: Did you do any work in Bhamipura before coming to Canada?

MD: We did agricultural work.

MB: And studies?

MD: I didn't do any studies.

MB: Okay. Was this the first time your family was going? Had you dad ever gone to Canada first, or anyone else?

MD: No. My brother was there, he had sent for us.

MB: Okay, so your brother sponsored all of you then.

MD: Yes.

MB: Okay. So what did you do upon coming here?

MD: We came to Duncan first, but for 5-6 months I didn't find any work so then I did clean-up work in Maple Ridge for 1-1.5 years. Then after that I got started in the mill.

MB: Okay, so in what year did that happen? '83?

MD: I believe I started working in the mill in July of '83.

MB: Do you remember what the name of that mill was?

MD: That was Fraser Cedar. Now that very mill's name is Maple Ridge Red Cedar.

MB: And so, this is in Maple Ridge then.

MD: Yes, it is in Maple Ridge. Now it is called Maple Ridge Red Cedar.

MB: What kind of mill is this?

MD: Shake and shingle mill.

MB: Okay. And how many people were working here?

MD: Three shifts used to run so over 100 men would work. Now it is a lot less and only one shift works and I'd say maybe just 70 men work now.

MB: And were there any apney then mostly?

MD: It is mostly apney, no gorey.

MB: Even back then it was mostly apney and no gorey?

MD: Even then, it was mostly all apney and if there were gorey there were just two or four.

MB: Okay. And so upon coming here, had you all just lived with your brother then?

MD: I moved in '89. My mother and father returned to India after 8-9 months.

MB: Back to India?

MD: Yes, back to India. My Taya (father's brother) got sick so because of that they had to go back.

MB: And so they never came back after that?

MD: They never came back after that and then they had passed away after a few years. And my mother only stayed 3-5 years here in Canada. She was a little sick too and then she returned.

MB: Okay, so she has stayed here for a little while then.

MD: Yes, she has stayed for about 3-4, but then she also passed away. Her doctor had said that it'd be better.

MB: So you stayed with your brother then?

MD: Yes, I stayed with my brother then in '86 I got married. And then in '89 I moved out.

MB: So did your wedding happen in India?

MD: It happened here.

MB: Where did it happen?

MD: The Abbotsford temple.

MB: The first one that was built there?

MD: Yes, the first one. There was no other temple.

MB: And so you said in '86 you got married and in '89 you bought your own house.

MD: Yes.

MB: So for how long did you stay working at Fraser Cedar?

MD: I am still there today!

MB: Ohh! You've only stayed at one mill then?!

MD: At one mill. I am still there. I think it has been about 30-32 years now.

MB: Oh wow. So how did you find work at this mill? Did anybody get you working?

MD: My friend had got me working. He had taken me. He knew them there.

MB: Okay. And what was your first job from the beginning.

MD: First, I had learned to pack.

MB: Packing what?

MD: Packing shingles and packing shakes. And then after a while I learned blocking. And I think I did block work for 2 years and then they made me a Cuber man. So for many years I did cubing. And then I had a problem in my hip.

MB: Was that a result of your work?

MD: Yes, because of my work. Then the owner said, don't stop but the doctor had told me that I could no longer do heavy work. But the owner said don't leave, just learn the job of the foreman then. So since then I've become a foreman.

MB: Okay, since how long?

MD: I believe I have been a foreman since '89 or at least '90.

MB: Okay, so it's been 25 years for sure.

MD: Yes.

MB: Okay. So how did you find your first job to be? This was your first job in the mill. You had done clean up before too. But how did it feel?

MD: For a week it was really difficult.

MB: Yes, tell me about that.

MD: The first week on doing the blocks, well I had been doing packing before, but after the first week on the blocks we were barely making it home. It was even difficult taking off our shoes! Having to come from India and to do such heavy work. Then afterwards there was no difference. After that, whether I worked two days or three, the work would keep going on.

MB: So were you doing really long shifts then?

MD: No dear, just 8 hours.

MB: 8 hours. 7 days?

MD: 5 days.

MB: Okay. Did you try looking for work anywhere else or?

MD: I just found the work good so I never felt the need to.

MB: Yeah. Did you know prior to coming to Canada that you'd be working in the mill?

MD: No, I had no idea. I had just known from talking to my brother on the phone that they pull lumber and pieces of wood. This and that.

MB: What was your brother doing?

MD: He was working in a lumber mill.

MB: He too was in the forestry industry. So he didn't exactly get you working, he just informed you.

MD: Yes. He was in a lumber mill and I was in a shake and shingle mill. The pieces that go on the roofs come from here. But the long pieces like 2 x4 or 2 x 10 are made there.

MB: In the lumber mill.

MD: Yes.

MB: Okay, so tell me a little bit about the different kinds of jobs that you did.

MD: So there is shake and shingle packing. For the shakes, the person who cuts the cubes is the Cuber man. For the shingle, they are called the sawyer – there the large machine saws are running. There is a saw in the front that keeps trimming on both sides.

MB: So tell me about how you found it to be – how you found your jobs in the mill to be.

MD: I found it to be great. I've had a good time at my job. Everything of mine has been made, and only by working, has it been made.

MB: So was the difficulty on just the fact that it was heavy work?

MD: Well when you're a new person from India, or even from here and you've never done any work of that type, the blocks are really heavy. Like one block is 10-15 kilos and then 20-30 kilos. And even some blocks that are up to 50 kilos! And to have to pick them up and put them. Then it's not difficult. But when you're first starting and have never done it before, then it is extremely difficult. Like you for example, you're educated, correct? So you've never done farm work. To have to pick berries in the hot sun would be so difficult for you.

MB: Yes, you're completely right. Okay, so what things have you found to be nice about working in the mill?

MD: Like what do you mean by nice or good?

MB: Like what the advantages you saw by working there. Is this union or non-union.

MD: No, it is non-union.

MB: Okay, so did you not receive all of the benefits or anything?

MD: We received all the benefits. We still do receive them all.

MB: Okay. So what kinds of advantages would you say you got from working in the mill in comparison to others? For example, some people who come here work in the farms.

MD: For anyone who couldn't find work in the mill, they had to work in the farms in those times. But working in the mill means better money and receiving benefits. In the farms there are no benefits.

MB: At that time, what was your pay?

MD: I think the pay ...the government maxim, if that's what it's called, used to be \$4-5. I used to get \$4.50. When I started working on the blocks I used to get around \$7.

MB: Per hour?

MD: Per hour. And then slowly it started increasing and increasing. Now, the pay has increased for everybody.

MB: Yeah. So when you first came to Canada, you were in Duncan you said?

MD: My brother was in Duncan and his mill was in Honeymoon. But then it stopped, it closed down.

MB: It was his mill?

MD: No, he was just working there. It was a union mill of goras. And so we had to move here because there wasn't any work for him there.

MB: In Honeymoon.

MD: We lived in Duncan, but the mill was in Honeymoon, yes.

MB: So then all of you moved to Abbotsford?

MD: No Mission. We've been in Mission since then. In '82 we came to Mission. We had rented somebody's basement and we stayed there for about 8 months to a year and then we got our own house. Then we had sold that house in Duncan.

MB: So about food and cooking, did your sister-in-law just handle everything?

MD: My sister-in-law?

MB: Yes.

MD: She was the one making everything. She'd be the one who did the making and we'd be the ones for eating. And she also worked as well in the farm for about 2-3 months.

MB: For groceries, I'm guessing there weren't very many stores that sold Punjabi or Indian groceries.

MD: Back then there was in Abbotsford. But less people went there and more people went to Vancouver instead to get their groceries. They'd go to get their 2 weeks' worth of groceries. And otherwise, we'd get milk and butter here from these stores. Like butter could be purchased here.

MB: So you mostly had to go to Vancouver then.

MD: Yes there was a small store. Sometimes we'd go after a month. Even to cut our hair we'd have to go to Vancouver.

MB: Ohh, okay.

MD: There weren't any haircut places here.

MB: So there were very few haircut places here then?

MD: There weren't any at all! Nor were there any stores.

MB: Okay. So at the time when you came to Mission, around how many apney people were living here then?

MD: According to what I know, I'd say there must have been around 40 families.

MB: Okay. So was there just one temple at that time, the one that was in Abbotsford?

MD: Yes, that one.

MB: So everyone used to go to that one?

MD: Yes, we'd all go there.

MB: Together? Was it like a community for all you people to stick together?

MD: To pray we'd go to that temple. There was no other temple. There was nothing like partying or anything like that.

MB: And how about celebrating things like Diwali or Lohri?

MD: Yes, we'd go to the temple. In that time, we didn't celebrate things much. Neither Lohri nor Diwali. We didn't do much. But if there was special Giyani's then we would.

Every year on New Year's Eve, everybody would be at the temple.

MB: The Abbotsford one.

MD: The Abbotsford one. Yeah, we didn't celebrate Lohri or anything like that, nor did we think much about it. We'd celebrate it on our own. Like Lohri for example, we'd do it at home and have some drinks and eat good food, just by celebrating it on our own.

MB: And when you came to Canada, how would you say the nature was of living here? The weather and the economy?

MD: When I first came here, the weather had really changed. Snow used to heavily fall then, but now it has been a few years since it's even snowed. So there's been lots of changes.

MB: How did you think it was? I'm guessing it was your first time seeing snow?

MD: It was my first time seeing it. It was very cold and when it snowed I wouldn't go outside.

MB: And how was the economy, like the cost of living?

MD: Living was good. Like now it has changed. You can take yourself for example. Now you buy things from big malls and stores. Back then it wasn't like that. Like The Bay for example. There used to be a big Bay store, and Sean and Fields. We'd take the kids there and for their 11th and 12th grade years in school, they'd go there and select what they wanted to wear. But what do you mean by economy, I didn't understand that.

MB: Economy is like, how would you say.

KS: Like how much money people had and what the cost of things were.

MD: Back then it was good. There weren't any beggars. The pay was good in that sense. Now with \$100 dollars, I guess you can only fill one or two bags of groceries at the store. In that time, with \$100 dollars you could fill your whole buggy.

KS: The buggy would fill up.

MD: Yes. That was because of people's money and their good pay.

MB: So you still work at the mill to this day?

MD: I am still there today.

MB: Part time or full time?

MD: The mill had caught on fire on the 25th of December. Now on the first week of March 2015 it should be up and running again. Now it's UIC.

MB: So you will take retirement later then.

MD: I'll only take retirement when I'm 65 years old!

MB: Not yet, though.

MD: No.

KS: Do you want to tell us anything else about working in the mill if you have anything interesting about your experience?

MD: It was good work, I don't have a story. Everyone stayed with one another very well. Like living in a village or going to the temple, the mill had no difference like that. It's almost as if we are all each other's brothers. That's how we consider it amongst ourselves.

KS: Is it all apneys working there?

MD: It is all apneys. They are goreys in the office.

MB: So there's no difference between the gorey and apney.

MD: No. A gora that was working in the mill before me, who has taken retirement, was just so nice. I was totally uneducated, but that gora taught me a little bit about how to converse in English. He'd tell me, "Malkiat, don't worry about it." Like if I said anything wrong or incorrect, he'd tell me he understood me. That's the way we acquainted ourselves with one another.

MB: Okay, thank you Uncle. That's all there was.