

Malkit Singh Sidhu Transcription
Interview Date: January 28th, 2015

MB: What is your name?

MS: Malkit Singh Sidhu.

MB: When were you born?

MS: November 13, 1926.

MB: And where did it happen?

MS: Khosa Pando Ke. My maternal side. District Faridkot. Before it used to be Firozpur, then it became Faridkot. It was really old.

MB: And when did you first come to Canada?

MS: 1959.

MB: How old were you? (30).

MB: And did somebody sponsor you? On what basis did you come?

MS: My brother sent for me.

KS: It was the quota system for high country. Your brother sponsored for you?

MS: Yes, he came over the waters but I came by train. He came in '52.

KS: Did he send for just you or your whole family?

MS: There was no family here then. The visitor's law opened up in the '70s.

KS: What quota was it?

MS: They'd fill out one high class quota. At that time.

KS: Was the rest of your family in India then?

MS: They came after ten years. People were living as single back then.

KS: Was your brother also single?

MS: He was single too but he got married in '63 when his wife came. And then in '67 or '68 I had my family and sent for all my brothers and sisters.

KS: Were you married before you came?

MS: I was married. All my children are Indian born.

MB: What did you do in India before coming here?

MS: Farming.

MB: What did you do when you came here then?

MS: I was pulling wood. I did that for \$1.00.

KS: Where did you work here? In Mission?

MS: Our old relatives had a mill here, I worked there.

KS: What mill?

MS: I don't remember. It was Gill's mill.

KS: You worked in Inder Singh Gill's mill?

MS: Yeah, they were my relatives. He had sent for my brother.

KS: After how long did you find work upon coming here?

MS: I sat around free for at least a year. I would eat or drink, this and that, but it was hard to find work. There was a mill out by Jasper, I worked there for three years from '62-'65. Then I went to work in Squamish. I worked 5 years there then. And then in Pitt Meadows I worked 22-23 years.

KS: Do you remember the names of the mills or did you forget them?

MS: I don't remember. But in '91 I had left my work. And after that I didn't work.

KS: You had retired?

MS: Yes. In 1991.

KS: How old were you when you retired?

MS: I was 65 by then. After 65 I didn't work in the mill.

KS: What was your work in the mill? Did you pull lumber at every mill you worked at?

MS: It was always just pulling lumber.

KS: The green chain?

MS: On the green chain. I didn't do anything else.

KS: You didn't do any other work.

MS: I didn't. The lumber would come and we'd pull it.

KS: And how did you find the work? Was it difficult?

MS: **Mumbling** At first as a newcomer..

KS: As a newcomer it was hard but then it was okay to you.

MS: I learned and as you slowly learn you move on ahead.

KS: Did you try to find any work anywhere else?

MS: When the river was frozen over we'd drive our cars over it. (Mumbling)

KS: It was very cold.

MS: It was very cold. We'd wear many layers and 2 pairs of gloves at a time.

KS: Your work was outside?

MS: Yes, outside. Our throats would be dry. It was a very awful time. Then we'd come home and cook Langar and stay warm.

KS: For how many people would Langar be cooked for?

MS: There were around 4-5 people.

KS: At home?

MS: Of course at home, where else?

KS: Were those 4-5 men alone or did they have their women with them?

MS: There weren't any women, no. In the whole town there would be just 2 women. In that time we could fill our whole gas tank with just \$5; gas was very cheap then. You know the old Gurdwara in Abbotsford that is over a hundred years old?

KS: Yes, were people doing jor mela there?

MS: Jor mela would happen maybe just once a year. But we'd go all the way there to get flour or sugar if we were going to make anything for the Gurdwara. Then they had a Giani Ji as the cook in the mill for the cookhouse and he'd look after so many men. Only I'd know what kind of hard work and circumstances we had to go through - it was very cold!

KS: Where were you getting your groceries from – Vancouver?

MS: There was a Punjabi place called Hilton in downtown Vancouver where the PNE takes place. There was a store there that was Punjabi.

KS: You'd sit in one car and all of you would go.

MS: Yes. (Mumbling)

KS: Even for work would you all carpool together?

MS: In that time nobody even bothered to wear belts and do any of that – no. (mumbling a lot of things)... Men would just go to and from Mission to work. It was hard to make a dollar.

KS: Were there any other Punjabi men that were working in the mills with you?

MS: The Punjabi men lived here or they lived there – I don't know.

KS: No, I mean did all Punjabis work with you or were there also gorey or Japanese?

MS: There were gorey.

KS: How many gorey?

MS: There were gorey and there were also Japanese.

KS: Was the relationship amongst one another okay?

MS: If you stay good, you'll have good relationships.

KS: Were the gorey and Punjabi's eating together?

MS: No, separately on your own. And I spent my time well over the years. It's been 20-25 years since I've left and retired.

KS: You were saying that you lived through a very difficult time

MS: That was just at first, only in the beginning.

KS: Tell us a little bit about what those difficult things were. A story or anything.

MS: We would be in the cold all the time. Sometimes we'd go to Victoria to roam around. The fare was just \$2.00 then for the ferry.

KS: How would you reach the ferry? By car or bus?

MS: The ferry leaves early in the morning. We'd go by car or bus if needed.

KS: Would you go anywhere else to roam around?

MS: We'd go wherever. Sometimes Lake Cowichan. It's near Victoria.

KS: And anything else like eating or drinking?

MS: We'd make our own food and cook it on our own. (Mumbling)

KS: Do you want to tell us anything else like a story or any problems you encountered in your life?

MS: No, nothing like that. If you stay true and well with anyone you don't encounter problems.

KS: And your children that came, did they get an education or did they work in the mills as well?

MS: They did farming and things like that.

KS: Did they study?

MS: There wasn't anything.

KS: How much did you study in India?

MS: I didn't.

KS: You didn't study. You just did farming.

MS: Yeah. There were like 50 of us living together there. We'd always stay together.

KS: And when you came here by yourself to your brother, did you find it difficult family wise?

MS: No, it wasn't like that. When you just know someone you can get working. I'd earn about \$5 sometimes by pulling lumber. (Lots of mumbling) We used to keep our things tied together and be prepared for work anywhere.

KS: Were your mill union or non-union?

MS: Union. In '62 I was at a union somewhere in Jasper. Not here.

KS: Did you find any difference in working at a union vs non-union.

MS: No, not at all.

KS: Was there any difference between the owners or anyone?

MS: That was a gora mill. There were Punjabis but it was a gora mill.

KS: Did you get along with them all?

MS: Yes, very well. Then they kept a cook. You'd give your fee of \$5 and you'd be able to eat what you wanted.

KS: Whatever days you worked the cook would make you food for those 5 days. And on the weekends you'd eat on your own from outside.

MS: From outside or we would make it on our own since we had the supplies.

KS: Did you find it difficult making your own food?

MS: No, I even do it now. You don't want to die hungry... I lived through a very difficult time.

Resumed interview with part 2.

KS: So when you first came to Canada, ten people came to pick you up?

MS: Ten people came to pick me up, yes. I'd bring pickled jar from the pind. Mango pickles. We'd eat it there. We could get everything back then.

KS: You'd divide it amongst everyone who came to get you. And even when you were going back to India, they'd send messages with you?

MS: Messages, no, they'd just come along to drop me or anyone off. Two or three cars would come at once when they'd come to pick me up.

KS: Then you'd eat roti.

MS: Yes. When my brother came they had roti. (Lots of mumbling. Please refer to audio).