

Saw Mill Worker Stories

Manga Lagah Narrative

Interview Date: February 8th, 2015

Mr. Manga Lagah was born on January 1929 at the village of Pabma, District Jalandhar, Punjab, India. He came to Canada in 1954 under the sponsored support of his in-laws at the age of 25 years.

When he first came to Canada, Manga Lagah worked in a mill factory at Langford in Victoria. He did lots of heavy work in that factory for 25 years. To find work, he used to go to the mill and they noted his name and told him that they will inform him later if there was work. His company was not under union first, but later it became unionized. According to Manga Lagah, there was job stability in a unionized company as compared to the private, non-unionized company.

When Manga Lagah came to Canada, he had brought very little money with him. Initially, he had the feeling that he was going to face a lot trouble by coming to Canada. He came to live with his in-laws in Victoria, and his father-in-law was working at a mill. His father in law had come to Canada in 1930 the same year that his daughter (Manga Lagah's wife) was born. Manga Lagah's father in law's dad had come to BC even earlier in 1906. Manga Lagah had been betrothed to his wife in 1942, when she was only twelve years old. That was the tradition back then as the parents would set the marriage and decide with whom the girl would marry. Those days, the parents would pick the boy and the girl for marriage, by arranging a marriage.

When Manga Lagah came to Canada, his Uncle and his father were already living in Canada. He worked in a Lumber factory. His wife came and joined him in 1959. Their children, two sons and one daughter, were all born in India. When his eldest daughter came to Canada with her siblings and mother, she was already attending Kindergarten as she was born in 1954. Manga Lagah didn't sponsor his family to join him until his work started and he knew he would be financially able to support them.

Manga Lagah and his wife came to Victoria first and have been living there ever since. That time, there was an old Gurdwara located on Graham Street which has now been taken down and replaced by a new Gurdwara. Mrs. Lagah's grandfather had been involved in building of that original Gurdwara. The Punjabi community would get together in the gurdwara and they used to celebrate festivals together, for example Lohri, Vaisakhi, Nagar Kirtan and Diwali etc. and also for family celebrations including birthdays. It used to be a big crowd in that small gurdwara those days. They would get the men to bring the wood and then they would make the lentils (daal); the stove was a wood stove and that's how they made the food. There was one Italian Grocery store in Victoria where they used

to buy the Indian grocery including lentils and different kinds of flours. The grocery store was located near the mill which was very convenient.

Manga Lagah worked only in one mill but he does not remember the name of the mill. Mr. and Mrs. Lagah did not face much difficulties those days, except for the fact that all new immigrants face some challenges in the initial stages when they migrate to a new place. His wife said that they did not wear Punjabi suits often, especially while going outside their homes. If they wore Punjabi suits, the people of European origin used to swear at them and abuse them. So she had to wear western clothing.

When Mrs. Lagah's grandfather worked in the mill, he used to earn 10 cents per hour. And the milk and butter used to be about 25 cents. Manga Lagah left the mill work around 1984, and after that he never worked. He became ill and when he left he was earning sick pay. His sickness was not because of working in the mill but something else unrelated.