

Mohinder Singh Gidda Transcription
Interview Date: November 30th, 2014

MB: What is your name?

MG: My name is Mohinder Singh Gidda.

MB: And when were you born?

MG: June 13, 1949.

MB: And where were you born?

MG: Village Pathlawa, Punjab, India.

MB: Parlava?

MG: Pathlawa. P-A-T-H-L-A-W-A. Punjab, India. The district used to be Jalandhar then. Now it is Newa Shehr.

MB: Yeah. And was that where you lived, in Pathwala, Punjab?

MG: No, in Sujjon.

MB: Sujo? What is the spelling?

MG: S-U-J-J-O-N.

MB: Sujjon. So you were born in Pathlawa and you lived in Sujjon.

MG: Pathlawa. Pathlawa.

MB: And had you studied there?

MG: Yes, I did my grade ten there first. Then after that I went to tech school in Phagwara.

MB: Tech School?

MG: Yeah, industrial training in ..?

MB: So, after the tenth grade.

MG: I finished grade ten in '66. In '66 I then went to Phagwara. It used to be called ITA then, Industrial Training Centre; or called ITC or ITI. Industrial Training Institute, yeah.

MB: And so you finished your education there then? Your degree?

MG: Yes, over there I learned trades for radios and TV's.

MB: How long did you study then?

MG: It was for 2 years. And after that I did a one-year apprenticeship then.

MB: Where?

MG: Paldi, District Hoshiarpur.

MB: Oh, okay.

MG: P-A-L I think D-I.

MB: Paldi.

MG: Yeah, district Hoshiarpur. There I did roof work.

MB: You started by doing roof work?

MG: The apprenticeship, yeah. One year. One year apprenticeship.

MB: Then?

MG: So, that's '68 I did two years of school and 1 year apprenticeship, '69. Then in '69 I opened my own shop in Newa Sher.

MB: Oh, okay. What was it called?

MG: It was called International Radio & TV.

MB: And what kind of work were you doing at this job?

MG: To repair the radios and sell the new one, yeah.

MB: So for how long did you keep this shop running?

MG: Well from '69 to end of February '70.

MB: Oh, so for a little while then.

MG: Just a little while. Then I came here.

MB: Oh, okay. So tell me a little bit about that then. To come here you had to leave everything. What is the story behind that then?

MG: Well, I came here as a visitor with a visitor visa. That was 1970. March 3rd, 1970. I landed at the Vancouver airport.

MB: ... And was anyone in Canada at the time prior to your arrival?

MG: My cousins were here.

MB: Okay.

MG: Tarlock Singh Gidda, yeah. He was actually who sent for me.

MB: Did he sponsor you?

MG: Well, he couldn't sponsor me because he was my cousin and we had blood relation. In 1968 they finished the blood relation. It used to be blood relation before 1968 and then Trudeau came in power, Prime Minister of Canada. He, I think he changed something. Before '68 people came as family or blood relation but he was my first cousin and he can't sponsor me, right.

MB: Oh, because he wasn't immediate family?

MG: Yeah, because he wasn't related by blood. He was my first cousin. So after some months, because of my trade in radio and TV, I applied for the landed status.

MB: For what status?

MG: For landed immigrant.

MB: Landed immigrant. So, PR? Permanent Resident?

MG: Well at that time we used to call it landed immigrant. Now they call it PR.

MB: Right. So after a few months you applied for it? And you got it right away?

MG: No, I was short by a couple of points.

MB: Oh, then what happened?

MG: Then I appealed it. My appeal was pending when I got married. She came from England.

MB: England?

MG: Your aunty.

MB: India or England?

MG: England. She lived there ten years, ten or eleven years. But at the same time the Canada immigration minister, Bryce Mack zee, he kind of did that '72 up to '72 never came. Regardless of whether they came by education or not, they gave that status to everybody. In 1972.

MB: So, your shop was only running for a few months then.

MG: Yeah.

MB: So you shut it down completely?

MG: Well there was still my father and brother. They disassembled it, took all the tools and everything.

MB: Okay. And what did your father and brother do in India?

MG: My father was a brick layer.

MB: Brick layer?

MG: Yeah, all his life. My brother, at that time, he was a student. Now he is an electrician by trade. Right now he is a principal at ITI, Newa Sher.

MB: So, still in India.

MG: Yeah. He is retiring next year. He started at ITI at the training institute, the same place where I got my education. He did the same but he did electrician trade instead of radio and TV. So then he was a teacher, like as an electrician. Then he wrote some more, upgraded himself and then he became an instructor and then a principal.

MB: Mhm. And so tell me about your wedding and what the story is behind it.

MG: The wedding we married, you know, then I bought the house at the same time. I was going to do my trades like radio and TV, but because of my family responsibilities and everything I couldn't do it because there was no support for me to do my studies.

MB: So when you came to Canada, there were only your cousins and no other family here?

MG: No.

MB: No? So your wedding that happened in Canada, there were only your cousins and no other family attending it then?

MG: No.

MB: Okay.

MG: In 1975, I brought my sister here. She was engaged so I married her off in '75, yeah.

MB: And your wedding happened in '72 or '73 you said.

MG: That was mine but this is about my sister's. The first person in my family after me was my sister who I called for. I then married her off here.

MB: Did she come here by being sponsored?

MG: No she was engaged here due to the immigration system here before. Back then you could get engaged and then send for someone. Not me, but her husband to be did. He had sent for her here then they had their wedding.

MB: Oh, okay. And is that how you sent for your wife as well?

MG: No, she came as an independent because of her sister.

MB: Oh, okay so her sister had sponsored her.

MG: Yeah, Baldeesh did.

MB: Okay. Um, so since you came in 1970 to the point you got married, what kind of work did you do?

MG: I did Snow crest for a month or so.

MB: What is Snow crest?

MG: A canary. On Marshall, you know the Marshall River Road?

MB: Mhm.

MG: I worked almost twelve hours on the farm on one of the Chinese farms on 168th in Surrey, Cloverdale. I worked twelve hours there then eight hours here.

MB: Okay, so you were working full time with twelve hours at the farm and then eight hours at the canary.

MG: 20 hours, yeah.

MB: How did you find work at Snow crest?

MG: Just because one of my friends was there that's why.

MB: Oh, because you had a friend. And how about at the farm, how did you find work there?

MG: There one of my cousin's brother-in-law. He was working there so he informed me about the job, yeah.

MB: And what kind of work did you do at the canary?

MG: At the canary it was just labour work.

MB: Labour work. And the farm was the same thing then?

MG: Yeah, that too was just labour work. When I went all the way to Prince George for 2 weeks.

MB: When?

MG: In 1971.

MB: For 2 weeks.

MG: Yeah, to look for a job,

MB: And how was that?

MG: Uh, I couldn't find any. My cousin's friend sent me over to Terrace.

MB: Terrace?

MG: I got off the bus at 3 o'clock in the morning. There was no coffee shops, no taxi – nothing. I had one pair of shoes, new shoes, the snow ones over there. And a suitcase in my hand. I walked at 3 in the morning between the bushes for five miles.

MB: Five miles!

MG: Yeah. And in the month of November there was frost and everything.

MB: Did you know where you were going?

MG: Yeah, they gave me directions but I finally found the place. There was a new sawmill there but they interviewed me and they said if you had come one week earlier you would've found work.

MB: Ahh.

MG: So when I walked on the way back ... there was only one bus going during the whole day. So I hitchhiked on the way back somebody gave me a ride to Prince George. So when I was coming back to Prince George, at Williams Lake and others, I tried to find jobs there on the way. But it wasn't successful.

MB: Why was it so difficult at the time to find a job?

MG: Uh, I guess it was because I was new and didn't have any sawmill experiences.

MB: You didn't have any sawmill experiences, that's why. And for Terrace, did your friend send for you there or your cousin?

MG: No, someone recommended for me to from Prince George to go and try over there.

MB: Oh, okay so someone just told you to go give it a try and that there might be opportunities there.

MG: A brand new mill had been made there. There was heat and everything, just like there's a furnace here. It was a good mill but I couldn't find anything.

MB: Do you remember the name of that mill?

MG: Uh... Northwood I think.

MB: Northwood. So you went all the way there and didn't have any luck so from there you came back from Prince George to Abbotsford?

MG: Yeah. On the way back I was still looking for jobs but I couldn't find anything.

MB: Yeah. And then what? What did you do?

MG: Then I went back in '71 to Louis Creek next to Kamloops.

MB: And?

MG: There was a small sawmill there.

MB: What was that sawmill's name?

MG: Um... it was the Louis Creek something, I'm not sure at this point.

MB: Louis Creek Saw mill maybe. And how did you find a job there? What was the reason for going there – had someone told you about it?

MG: There somebody knew me so when I went there finally I got a job there.

MB: You got the job?

MG: Yeah. The pay was \$2.65 per hour at the time.

MB: \$2.65?

MG: Yeah. The canary at Snow crest that was \$1.75 then.

MB: Wow! You remember perfectly.

MG: Yeah. Then, uh sorry, before I came I found a job at McKenzie at PGE Railway. I worked only one day, I don't know if you want to put it in there or not.

MB: Yeah, I will.

MG: Before I came to Louis Creek. Before I came to Louis Creek.

MB: Why did you only work there for one day?

MG: I only worked there for one day because the supervisor - and I had a friend of mine and teacher from India- he was kind of racist; he was very prejudice. He was giving us a hard time.

MB: Racist to who? To 'apneys'

MG: Yeah.

MB: And he was 'apna?'

MG: He was an Aboriginal. Native.

MB: Aboriginal. And what was the demographic or population at the railway? Were there mostly 'apneys' or Chinese?

MG: Uh, there was a mix there.

MG: A mix. And were they racist towards everyone?

MG: It was more so towards the 'apneys.'

MB: What kinds of things were they saying?

MG: They were just giving a hard time, you know, to do this or to do this. Criticism, you know. So, you know, when you're new at any place you don't know everything, right. So...he kind of wanted to get rid of us so the other person, my friend he was the teacher from India, him and me we both quit.

MB: You both left? After just one day both of you were certain that you didn't want to work there.

MG: Yeah. It was \$1.25 or \$1.75 something like that.

MB: Day? Or hour?

MG: Per hour.

MB: Okay, yeah. Okay, um, and this too was in 1971.

MG: Yeah.

MB: And then you went to Louis Creek near Kamloops. And your friend had told you about this, yeah?

MG: Yeah.

MB: And did you go by yourself or did a friend accompany you?

MG: A friend was with me. You know Tarsem Banwait. He was the one with me.

MB: Yes. So he went with you then.

MG: Yeah.

MB: And so they hired you right away then. Was it a sawmill or planer mill?

MG: Yes. It was a sawmill. Sawmill.

MB: What was your job there?

MG: There was mostly just labour work like sometimes piling up the load in the yard you know when the loads drop. Yeah, greenchain.

MB: Greenchain. What does a man do as greenchain?

MG: Uh, he pulls the lumber. You know, the different sizes and putting them into different loads and different packages.

MB: So you did different types of jobs there then.

MG: Yeah.

MB: For how long did you work there?

MG: There I, um... I think about six months.

MB: Six months? How old were you at this time?

MG: When I came to Canada I was 20, yeah.

MB: 20?

MG: 20 when I came from India, yeah, in '70. I was going into 21.

MB: And so all of this was before your wedding. And so by working six months, you had left this job?

MG: Yeah, my tonsils were bugging me because it was too cold there. It was -41 or something, the temperature. So I came back here. We were living in Matsqui at the time on Harris road with my cousin.

MB: Yeah. And. Louis Creek Sawmill was apna owned or gora owned?

MG: Gora owned.

MB: And how many apney were working there? Who was it more of?

MG: Uh, it was mostly French people and apneys.

MB: Okay. So how did you think the environment was of this mill? Did you find it okay? Because this was your first mill.

MG: Yeah, but the accommodations there were not okay.

MB: Okay. Tell me about that.

MG: The building that was there in which we had our room had no frames, no doors, and water would only be kept in a bucket, which would just turn into ice. There were no washroom facilities. There was something made in the bushes with wood, like used at

farms, that we had to use. There was no water to drink, only the water that would come from the mountain. There was nothing for bathing.

MB: So were all you men living together in a room that was like a bunkhouse?

MG: A bunkhouse was different. There was double standards there too. There were the French or Italian – there were no apney in there.

MB: So only the goreys were getting the nice bunkhouses then?

MG: Yes. With heating and everything. What we had was a room like a cabin with no heat, no door, nothing.

MB: No water.

MG: No water. We used to get the water coming down from the mountain. No washrooms or shower facilities – nothing.

MB: So this is a difference between the goreys and apneys. Was this different relevant in the mills as well? How were people?

MG: Well apney people were working. You know, apney people have some backstabbers too. It was kind of like slavery. They had nice heat, bunkrooms, and showers there.

MB: For apneys?

MG: There wouldn't be a single apna amongst them. And with heating systems and everything, kind of like how some trailers are. I didn't even like this then, the no heating system and everything.

MB: Mhm. It was difficult to live.

MG: With -41 below, yeah.

MB: Wow.

MG: We used to wrap around the electric heating blanket, you know. Very cold. I came here then I went to Hammond, my cousin dropped me off there, I didn't have a car.

MB: Where?

MG: Hammond.

MB: Hammot?

MG: Hammond. H-A-M-M-O-N-D. Hammond. In Maple Ridge.

MB: So your cousin picked you up from Kamloops and took you there then?

MG: No we were living in Mission. In Matsqui. Matsqui. In December of '71.

MB: December of '71. You went with your cousin to Hammond.

MG: Yeah. He was working at the Fraser Mill so he dropped me off there.

MB: Because of them you got a job at Hammond?

MG: No, no. He was at Fraser Mill. He only just dropped me off on his way to work.

MB: Ohh, okay. But you didn't know about whether or not you'd get a job there.

MG: I had already gone there twice, but that was when I had a turban. They had rejected me then.

MB: Okay. Alright, tell me about that then.

MG: Then I got a haircut and went in '72.

MB: Back there?

MG: Yes. In January... I gave the application in January and they called me. I told them that I was a student, which is why I got it. That I only want to work for a little bit to make some money and then I want to go to school, right. So they gave it to me but I had

responsibilities back home here right since I got married and bought a house. Then I couldn't leave the job, right.

MB: What was the name of the mill in Hammond?

MG: First it was BC Forest Products in '72 – a Canadian company. BC Forest Product.

MB: And so you had already applied twice but it wasn't till after you had cut your hair that you got hired.

MG: Yes.

MB: While interviewing you and seeing your cut hair did they then say that it was okay.

MG: Yes.

MB: And is that why you cut it? Because you knew that you had to find a job here?

MG: Yeah, there was this thing going around that they don't hire people with a turban. Then, you gotta find the job right, so.

MB: So how much time or how many years did you end up working at BC Forest Products then?

MG: Uh, I was there almost from '72.

MB: '72 to what?

MG: To now.

MB: To now! Okay.

MG: But I quit in '74. May '74.

MB: Why is that?

MG: Uh, a couple of my cousins and brothers were in Fraser Mill. So it was easier going to Fraser Mill from here than going all the way to Hammond.

MB: All the way in Maple Ridge, yeah.

MG: '74 was a very bad year for the lumber market.

MB: Why?

MG: The market was slack, right. So after 3-4 months they laid me off over there.

MB: Fraser Mill?

MG: Yeah. Then I was on EI. I was to come to Mission because there was work there as opposed to Abbotsford. I was standing in the mill and the foreman there was very nice. He said, "Are you working right now or no?" and I said, "no." He said, "do you want to work?" and I said, "sure." He then called someone and he hired me right away.

MB: The Mission mill?

MG: No Hammond.

MB: Oh, back in Hammond again. They had come to know then?

MG: They had come to know that I was unemployed and gotten laid off. He then asked me if I wanted to come back and work again. They had told me that they'd give me a good reference if I ever came back. I did come but I didn't have any safety shoes or any work clothes. He was insisting for me to start right away but I said I'd come tomorrow and he said that's okay. They hired me right away there, yeah.

MB: At Hammond's mill BC Forest Product, what kind of work did you do there?

MG: I worked on the greenchain.

MB: Because you already had experience.

MG: Yeah. I did ten years on the greenchain.

MB: Till '82? Or '84, '85.

MG: Uh, yeah. Till '82.

MB: Then what did you do?

MG: Then the paper was saying that cedar dust is not good for you. We tried to stray because there is a lot of dust inside and I did so many years on the greenchain. So finally we started moving inside like the trimmer.

MB: Oh, trimmer. Saw trimming. So for how long did you do that?

MG: Oh about a couple of years.

MB: So maybe till '86 or '87.

MG: Mm... a couple of months not a couple of years, sorry. In '82 they made a new mill. Brand new.

MB: BC Forest Product did?

MG: Yeah.

MB: Where did they make it?

MG: In the same area. So when they made it in '82, July of '82, I didn't work too long on the trimming because then it was '82 and we had moved to the new mill. The one that it is right now. There I worked at the drop gate.

MB: Drop gate?

MG: Yeah.

MB: What is that?

MG: Where they sort lumber they have 3-4 gates. You put different wood of different size and different gates open up. You sort it there and do sorting. Wood sorting. Lumber sorting.

MB: And how long did you do the drop gate work?

MG: Uh, 20 years.

MB: 20 years?

MG: Yeah.

MB: How many apney and goreys were in this company?

MG: I would say at that time...there were more goreys and less apneys. About 10-15 people.

MB: 10-15 apney?

MG: Yeah... after that it had increased to more.

MB: Yeah. And this was gora owned, this Canadian company.

MG: First there may have been others working, we don't know. But when I got hired, it was BCFD. After that in '82 Fletcher Challenge took over Fraser Mill and Hammond. It was a New Zealand company, Fletcher Challenge. And they... I think Intefer came in '87 or '88. Uh... maybe '89. I'm not sure about the year. It could be '89.

MB: Mhm. And so then you basically

MG: Then I moved to a different job.

MB: Did you spend 40 years at BC Forest Industries?

MG: Uh, when I first began working when I was at the farm while also being at Louis Creek, they also counted that time too. So from '71... The three months of '71, uh... almost 40. Next February it will be 44 years.

MB: Oh, wow, okay. So obviously this company must have seemed good to you then.

MG: Well, once you build seniority one doesn't really think of going other places.

MB: Yeah. How did your seniority build there? How did you move up with different jobs?

MG: In the job, when you open up for any job, you have to build for the job right. So when you build seniority, on that basis when you know the job then they give you the job.

MB: So when you were in the beginning stages of finding a job, were you mostly looking for jobs in the mill or looking at other places as well?

MG: Mostly apney men, actually in '73, you can make a note... in '74, yeah. In '74 I went to Tallace. It used to be BC Tell.

MB: Tallus?

MG: Tallus. When they merged. Before that they used to be BC Tell. Then they merged with an Alberta company and called themselves Tallus, before it used to be BC Tell.

MB: Yes.

MGMG: So in they used to have an office in downtown Vancouver. BC Tell. So I went for an interview for a four year apprenticeship while I was in the mill, right. So I filled out an application for BC Tell and it was a four-year apprenticeship but I had a road block come up. They were happy to give me the four-year apprenticeship but the problem was that my trade was in radio and TV and they were looking for someone in communications, you know.

MB: Communications?

MG: Yeah. So I didn't have the skills so they didn't.

MB: So that didn't happen.

MG: No.

MB: Okay... alright, um, and how did you think the environment was working at BC Forest Products?

MG: BC Forest Products was a Canadian company and it was very good.

MB: Very good?

MG: Yeah.

MB: What were the good things about it?

MG: They were very uh...good to the people, for anything, you know. One of the things was that the BC MP would give shares to the employees. Free, like a 6% maximum. We would put in 75 cents and they would put in 25 cents in the shares. That was on the payroll.

MB: Oh, okay.

MG: So then Fletcher came and instead of 25 they made it 30. We put 70 in and they put 30. So then Intefer came and they took everything away. They said the supervisor should buy and you can't buy. That you can go buy on the open market but not on the payroll. So they showed proper sharing right. 25 cents per dollar or 30 cents per dollar. They took the 30 cents away from us. That's why BC MP was good and Fletcher was good too.

MB: Um, what else was good about this company?

MG: The first two companies?

MB: This company, which is BC Forest Products.

MG: There is not that much that is good about it but it is okay to hold the job, you know.

MB: Was Fraser Mill apna owned or gora?

MG: First Crown was of the goras. Then after the Fletcher Challenge, Intefer bought that one too because BC, Hammond, and Fraser Mill were built brand new at the same time. So when Intefer bought it that was part of the deal – Hammond and Fraser Mill.

MB: How did you find the work to be at Fraser Mill – good or hard?

MG: It was good but... the cedar weren't standing. The cedar always – it's okay for me, but not okay for some people. It's not good for anyone for allowing them.

MB: What does that mean?

MG: Cedar is what you call a different lumber, right. They were getting that from Hemlock. Cedar is not good for health. In the long run, cedar dust and whatnot. The other one is okay here.

MB: For health. Okay, yeah. ... So what are your earliest memories of working in the mill? I know that Louis was not a good experience for you, but how about after that? Maybe if you can tell me what your first impressions were of working in the mill.

MG: Impressions, well according to the wages it was good. I used to do 2 weeks night 2 days but when 7 years ago they cut it down to one shift then after that I did a steady day shift. So everybody knows me there. The best thing is that it is just like home. Everybody has known me for a long time. So all the retirement, whether it is for an apna man or gora, I always do it. Plus I have been on the safety committee for many years and still am. For 2-3 years I was part of the plant committee too. Then...I think because I am an employee and a lot of old people know me, to me it is like home. I go there and because everyone knows me, so.

MB: Yeah. So you really like it.

MG: Yeah.

MB: What are the advantages of working in the mill or what were the advantages back then?

MG: Then and even now there are benefits for medical – MSP we don't pay anything; extended we don't pay anything; dental we don't pay anything. Employer pays for everything, yeah.

MB: So, it's the benefits.

MG: Yeah. Your gloves, your hard hat

MB: Equipment.

MG: Yeah. It is part of a collective agreement. For gloves in old age we used to pay and now you can use any number with no charge.

MB: What kinds of difficulties or hardships would you say that you have experienced by working in the mill?

MG: Uh

MB: You've worked there for so many years. What kinds of difficult things have you had to face or hard times.

MG: Hard times would be like different supervisors at different times. Good or bad, it depends, you know. Now, last year – you know they don't show but they still have some difference towards us.

MB: What kind of difference?

MG: They may not show it in their hearts but if any man makes a mistake, the treatment, they have to treat you good because there is a union but if there wasn't any union they would give us a hard time.

MB: Hmm ... this difference being because you are an apna man?

MG: They do have a difference amongst the apney men.

MB: Even today.

MG: They still do but they won't show it on the inside.

MB: Because they can't.

MG: Because they can't but for everything they treat you differently, yeah. But because of the union, they cannot do it from the outside.

MN: So the advantage is that by working in a union you are expected to be treated well.

MG: Yeah. You have respect.

MB: Respect.

MG: Yeah. Because without union there is no job security. If you do 20-25 years and tomorrow they say they don't like you, you'd be sent home. You can't do anything. In union, they cannot send you home without any reason and if they do the union will fight for you, yeah. Yeah.

MB: Mmm... Okay. The way you experienced racism in your early times at Louis Creek...was that experienced again anywhere else after that? Or did you feel as though there was a shift in that after you cut your hair since you no longer had your turban.

MG: It was okay but whatever is in the mind of a gora, you cannot do anything about it. Even in this century we still see that some have more and some have less. But it is a lot more wherever there are non-union places. Union places still have some protection and rights. You can always fight for your rights through the union.

MB: Was this the only company that you've worked at that was a union or was Fraser Mill also union?

MG: Fraser Mill was also union. But Louis Creek was not. That was a non-union place. Over there they wouldn't even talk to the workers with any sort of decency or respect.

MB: Yes. Are you still working at the mill presently?

MG: Yes.

MB: So you haven't left yet.

MG: Yeah before it was 65 but a few years back they changed it. There is so compulsory but retirement is 65 but there is an option. You can still work and still get your Canada Pension Benefit and Union Pension and still go in.

MB: Mhm. When you first began working, since you've been working for so many years, what kinds of changes or shifts have you seen?

MG: Like in the old days when I was working on the greenchain right, there would be 13 men working on the greenchain.

MB: Apney men?

MG: No, altogether. Gorey or apney. Due to technology there is now only one or two persons on the greenchain. So when someone goes in the trade, there are 50-60 trades, different styles. Our mill is all computerized. You press a button and the saws shift by themselves. So mostly technology has. When I started the job there were 500 people. Then 450 then 400 then 300. Then 250. Now there is less than 100.

MB: Wow! All because of technology.

MG: Yeah. At that time there would be two shifts now there is one. But with technology it went from 13 men on the greenchain to only needing one, right.

MB: So back then it was a lot harder because you actually had to pull the lumber and everything.

MG: Yes, the lumber was heavy and it was very hard work. The lumber keeps coming and you cannot stop the chain for too long – you just keep pulling and keep pulling.

MB: So for your body

MG: Yes, it was hard. But back then we were young right. Now if we were to do that same work, you couldn't do it.

MB: Now I will be asking you about when you first came to Canada. What were your first impressions about Canada? You said that obviously it was very cold. What else was there to it?

MG: Otherwise, for finding a job there were a lot of hardships. When you find a job then you get a little excited but... you cannot forget what happened with you. At the least, the man can say at least I am working and I have a job.

MB: What was the family life like or you when you first came? Or even when you got married.

MG: It was good, yeah. Only shift worker by being 2 days and 2 nights, by the time your system is set up for afternoon shift you switch to day shifts then it is on and off. Now it is steady day shift.

MB: And then you were doing almost double of full-time so you were probably seeing your family very less.

MG: No, the shift was an 8-hour average one then. Before marriage the one that I did at Snow crest and at the farm, that was when I did lots of hours.

MB: And how long was that period for? When you were doing both the farm and Snow crest.

MG: A couple of months, yeah.

MB: A couple of months. Oh, okay.

MG: Then my cousin said to let one job go because you can get into an accident since it took an hour to commute there and an hour back so 22 hours.

MB: A 22 hour day.

MG: S you take a shower, eat, and then you're back there. So day and night there was 24 hours. I would do 22 hours with the jobs and on the road for a day.

MB: Yeah, okay. And what is your status right now? Are you a citizen?

MG: Canadian citizen, yeah.

MB: When did this shift happen from PR to citizen?

MG: They changed the system. Before it was if you are a British subject, since India was under British Colony, that you would get citizenship. Then after that they changed the rules of immigration to three years. So I wrote a test in '78 for the first time in Chilliwack court for citizenship and then I sponsored my parents, mom, dad, and my brother. I brought them here.

MB: Oh, okay. After you became a citizen, 8 years after coming.

MG: Yeah. They came in '79.

MB: Tell me a little bit about this picture here. You are shaking hands with a man here.

MG: Yes, this used to be a leader of a really big union, Jack Monroe. He was the national leader of IWA. So he came to our mill and there was a problem in the unions.

MB: In what year?

MG: I think it was in... I think it could be in ... '85 or '86. I think it was '85 probably. I'm just guessing. So I was the only one defending the IWA and there was a raid of the union happening by PBWC. They wanted to change the IWA. There were some people there who were taking leadership in the mill. They wanted to get rid of IWA and get a different union. So on my lunch break and my coffee break I used to go and defend the IWA. He knew and other people told him that I was defending the IWA and so he came to shake my hand to kind of appreciate, you know.

MB: And what were you fighting for?

MG: Some people were trying to get rid of the IWA.

MB: What is the IWA?

MG: International Workers of America. Then we changed it to International Woodworker of Canada – IWC. But there name as IWA was popular but this was IWA Canada.

MB: Is there anything else about the mill that you would like to tell me about since you are still working there to this day.

MG: Our first time mill that was Indo Canadian owned was by Moe Sahota. He used to live in Victoria. He used to be part of the Cabinet minister and MLA. He used to say that in the earliest times when he first came he had his father in Victoria and he wouldn't find any jobs there. Then he came to Vancouver Island as a different town because there was so much racism there. So it's not just a story of my own. The people who came before us after the Komagata Maru had to endure many hardships. There was no union back then and there was so much racism at the time and the wages were very low. They had to work very hard with some having to sell firewood or whatever they could. There were very less unions in the mill back then. They had to pull very heavy timber back then. There is a difference in comparison to now for those who don't have to pull it. It was very heavy and hard work. They had to endure a lot of hardships but after that in our time there was still heavy wood that had to be pulled but it wasn't as heavy or as bad as it was for them.

MB: Mhm. And in those times they weren't even able to bring their wives here either.

MG: Yes, there were very few back then. Although they did support them financially by sending money back but there were very few families here. Even in Abbotsford when I came in the 70's, there were only 2-3 apney families here. Us Indo Canadians, or East Indians you can say, weren't even allowed to buy any property or house back then in Abbotsford.

MB: You couldn't? Why?

MG: No. Because of the racists that were Mennonite. There was so much racism that we legally couldn't even buy a house!

MB: Then what did you do?

MG: Then slowly the racism had begun to decrease. And MLA, MP's, Major's, or counselors had recognized as gora's that yes, these people too need their rights.

MB: Because you bought your first house here in '72 right?

MG: Yes, but the oldest temple here, the Gur Sikh one from 1911, the elderly there would go where the larger temple across from it is. They would put their cows there and roam around. And Mill Lake used to be a mill. There they carried lumber on their shoulders to make that temple. But discrimination is never going to go away 100%. Because one those out there, whether German or White, have made up their minds, they're set in their ways of thinking. Not all people, but there are still some who are like this. But in recognition of the elderly men who came here and endured hardships, we are sitting here because of them. There were only 2-3 houses here and even that small temple wouldn't fill up. And we would stay standing by the Nishan Sahib. There used to be one lane to come and one lane to go.

MB: On South Fraser Way.

MG: There would sometimes even be cars just parked under there. Every half hour or so a car would come. I lived in Mission and there used to be 2-3 cars within all the apney families. They would come together and carpool to either the Vancouver or Abbotsford temple and even carpool together to work or get groceries together. There only used to be about 2-3 cars altogether within the apney people in Mission.

MB: So apney people would stay together all the time.

MG: Yes, they were very helpful towards one another back then in comparison to the times of today.

MB: Yes, yes.

MG: Things have changed.

MB: Yes. Do you have any photos of any of the times during which you worked at the mill or even pictures of your life when you came to Canada?

MG: Yes, I have some but I will have to find them.

MB: You have to find them. I will come by again another day then.

MG: I will find them and keep them aside for you.

MB: And I will come to scan them. Okay, that's all there was to our interview.

MG: Thank you for everything. This too is a matter of great honor that the history of our men will go into our museum for the new generation. Thank you once again for the interview and for all the information.

MB: Thank you!