

Saw Mill Worker Stories
Nazar Singh Gill Narrative
Interview Date: November 21, 2014

Nazar Singh Gill was born on 18th May, 1933, in Village Sidhwan Kalan, District Ludhiana, Punjab, India. He immigrated to Canada on January 1st, 1963, New Year's Day, at thirty years of age under the family class system and through a spousal sponsorship. Nazar Singh's wife was already a Canadian Citizen at the time of his arrival as she was already living in Canada. The couple were married in India, in Village Dhudike, District Moga. Before arriving to Canada, Nazar Singh attended school up to grade eight in his birth place Village. After his studies, Nazar Singh began assisting his father on the family farms. Nazar Singh would work on the family farm for much of his life until he immigrated to Canada.

Upon arrival, Nazar Singh found Canada to be a pleasant place especially when compared to the village life he was accustomed to. For example, he remembers being struck by the beauty of the street lamps, the building structures, etc. Nazar Singh's first job began two weeks upon his arrival to Canada at the Harman Saw Mill located in Mission. It was Nazar Singh's Uncle, and through a friend, who helped him find the job. He began by doing general clean-up work before the mill opened and then he worked to pick up the wood. After three years doing this position, Nazar Singh then began working at the Whonnock Lumber Mill located in Maple Ridge in 1966. He worked there for twenty six years until the mill shut down due to the competition of nearby opening mills.

In 1992, Nazar Singh Gill joined the Bay Lumber in Coquitlam where he worked for one year. Then, due to health issues unrelated to millwork, Nazar Singh was forced to retired in 1993. Even following his heart surgery, Nazar Singh wanted to continue to work, though his employers advised otherwise. For some time he received unemployment, and after that he began receiving pension. In total, Nazar worked in the mills for about 27 years, from 1963 till 1993.

In 1977, while he was working on the farms, Nazar Singh Gill bought a ten acre farm in Abbotsford. He then sold the farm after 3-4 years in 2010. Nazar Singh remembers that work in the mills was very difficult, as the lumber pulling was long, heavy and hard work. He first started working as a green chain puller at Harman Lumber Mill and at the Whonnock mill. Later, he learned grading, that is grading the lumber from 1968-69 and after that he continued grading the lumber until he retired. Green chain pulling entailed the lumber coming on 6-7 chains, and on one side the man is putting the lumber and on the short side a man is pulling the lumber. The Lumber Grading entailed a man standing on one side of the green chain and when the lumber came he determined what grade the lumber goes in. If it was clear, i.e. did not have any knots or defects, it would be marked as #1 and the clear lumber was then more valuable. For the second grade lumber, the price was lower. Grading was then a very important job in the mills. Nazar Singh worked with both Indians and people of European origin during his mill work career. In the

Harman Saw Mill for example, there were more Indian workers than people of European origin and in the Whonnock mill it was vice-versa. In addition, the mills were owned by different ethnicities of people; for example, the Harman Saw mill was owned by an Indian man whereas the Whonnock and Bay Lumber were companies were owned by American White men.

When discussing the hardships of working in the mills, Nazar Singh claims that there were few that he recalls in part because they were earning good money. For example as a grader Nazar Singh earned \$3.00 per hour which was more than many others earned at the time. Nazar Singh Gill became a Canadian citizen three years after he arrived in Canada.