

Nazar Singh Gill Transcription
Interview Date: November 21, 2014

MB: What is your name?

NG: Nazar Singh Gill.

MB: Nazar Singh Gill?

NG: Yes.

MB: And you...when were you born?

NG: 18 May, 1933.

MB: 1933. Uh, and where were you born? In what village?

NG: Sidhwan.

MB: What district?

NG: Ludhiana.

MB: Ludhiana? And when did you first immigrate to Canada?

NG: 1963, New Year day.

MB: 1963, New Year day?

NG: Yeah.

MB: Okay. And what is your immigration status currently? PR? Or citizen?

NG: Citizen. Canadian citizen.

MB: Canadian citizen? When you first came to Canada, what was your status then? Did you come on the basis of marriage, or the point system, or family class?

NG: No. My wife was a citizen.

MB: Yes.

NG: And she had come here before

MB: Yes.

NG: And she then applied for me, and then I had come.

MB: So she sponsored you on the basis of marriage?

NG: Sponsor, yes.

MB: Okay. So your marriage had happened in India prior...

NG: The marriage had happened before.

MB: And she had come here to Canada.

NG: Yeah. Because she was a Canadian citizen and because of that she had come here first.

MB: Okay. Now I will be asking you about your story such as what your first impressions were when you first came here and other things. Uh, before coming to Canada where were you living? I believe you said Ludhiana?

NG: No, Ludhiana is where I was born. In Ludhiana District, Sidhwan, Kalan village.

MB: Kulaya village?

NG: Where there is a college, Sidhwan Kalan. That is where I was born....and where I was married, my village is Dhudike.

MB: Dhudike?

NG: Yes. Our district is Moga and now it is Firozpur.

MB: Yes.

NG: And there, I grew up. They had me in school at 5 or 6 years of age. In school I studied a little bit. And after that... my dad was a farmer. I went to go help him as much as I could ... and together we did agricultural work. And I was of thirty years of age when I first came here.

MB: Okay. So when did you leave your education to begin working in the farm?

NG: In my studies... well even then, my English wasn't very good, because of that I had to leave my studies; I had failed.

MB: Mhm. So you studied till grade 5?

NG: No, grade 8.

MB: Grade 8? Okay. So till you turned 30, you worked in the farm doing agricultural work.

NG: Yes, first I went to go help with my dad, then my dad begun getting old so I had been doing it by myself to support my family.

MB: Yes, yes. Um... now I will be asking you... when you first came to Canada you were 30 years old, in 1963...

NG: Yes.

MB: So when you first came to Canada for the very first time, what were you impressions of what it was like?

NG: Then it seemed very different compared to India. But I didn't feel too much because our relatives here, our *Chachey* (Dad's brothers) were always traveling here and back. The kinds of things that they'd say like about the mills and this and that ... and I didn't feel too much of a difference. But in comparison to India, the living like the streetlights, towns, grocery stores, and what have you were different to me.

MB: Mhm. In a good way or bad way?

NG: Good. Very good.

MB: Mhm. So that is my next question. Have you ever worked in a mill?

NG: Yes. When I first came here in 1963 on New Year, on the 19th of January I began working in sawmill.

MB: In sawmill?

NG: Yes. First, for some time I did some cleaning job. Like, before starting up the mill there was cleaning. And when the mill had started, there was work to pick up the wood.

MB: Mhm. Do you remember the name of the mill where you first began working?

NG: Harman Sawmill. Mission.

MB: Harman.

NG: H-A-R-M-A-N

MB: Sawmill?

NG: Harman Sawmill, yeah.

MB: And where was that? Abbotsford?

NG: In Mission.

MG: Mission. And that was in 1964 then?

NG: 1963 is when I first began working. In 1965, '66 I worked there. From there, after quitting... there was a Wonnoc Lumber.

MB: Wonnoc Lumber? What is the spelling?

NG: With a W... W-O-N-N- I guess N-O-C... N-N-O-C.

MB: Yes.

NG: And lumber.

MB: Lumber.

NG: Yeah.

MB: And where was that?

NG: In the Wonnoc area.

MB: And what did you start that?

NG: That I started in 1966 on the 2nd of May.

MB: So I will ask once again. You worked at Harman Sawmill in Mission in 1963 right?

NG: '63, '64, and till May of '66.

MB: Okay. Then after Wonnoc Lumber of the Won area...

NG: Yes, Wonnoc Lumber. It's sawmill.

MB: Yes.

NG: Because the thing that scrapes the wood is called sawmill.

MB: Yes. Then after that where did you work?

NG: After that?

MB: Yes.

NG: After that... the mill had shut down in 1992. In all those years I worked there.

MB: You worked at Wonnoc Lumber till 1992?

NG: Yes. And then it got shut down.

MB: So many years. Why did it get shut down?

NG: The owners there, they closed the mill; they said it was too old. There were newer mills. Then I had found work at Bay Lumber.

MB: Bay Lumber? In 1992?

NG: In '92.

MB: How many years did you work there?

NG: There I worked around a year then I had a heart problem.

MB: Okay. Where is Bay Lumber?

NG: It was in Coquitlam.

MB: Okay. So... Bay Lumber was your last job?

NG: Last job.

MB: That you finished in '93. In '92-'93.

NG: Yeah.

MB: Okay.

Sukhi: Uncle, the heart problem that you got, was it from working in the sawmill?

NG: No, the heart problem was just because of the body, diet and whatnot. Then I had surgery. After surgery I had told them to find me work, but they said no, you've just had surgery and there is no easy work.

MB: Okay.

NG: And so, they never gave me work. For some months I had received Unemployment. When my Unemployment had run out, I then applied for pension, and then I got pension.

MB: Oh, okay. So it has been ten years, twenty years then.

NG: No...

MB: It has been about twenty years. '93 was when you had your last job.

NG: Yeah! ... It has been about 20-21 years.

MB: Okay. Now, I've collected all your information of the mills that you worked at – it was three mills in total correct?

NB: Yeah. In between those... in 1977 I had bought a farm of ten acres. In Abbotsford.

MB: Yes.

NG: So I was working at the mill while also working at the farm.

MB: Okay. And all the mills that you worked at, they were all sawmills?

NG: Sawmills.

MB: Okay. Um, how did you find work at the mill instead of anywhere else?

NG: My uncle, the one who had helped me come here, his friend was at the mill as well. He then asked his friend that his own boy was about to come and that he needed to work.

MB: Yes.

NG: He said when the mill starts I'll give him work.

MB: Okay.

NG: Because I came on the 1st of January and on the 19th of January I began working at Harman Sawmill.

MB: So basically, before coming to India, you were in agreement that once you'd arrive you'd be working at the mill.

NG: Yes, back then it was normal anyway, that whoever was going to come was going to go work in the mill.

MB: Okay.

NG: There wasn't much work in the farms back then. And so he had asked him, and his friend said whenever he comes just send him my way. And so I found work there.

MB: Did you try to find working anywhere else or...

NG: No.

MB: In your perspective, you just saw the mill.

NG: No, because the mill was enough work for me.

MB: Yes.

NG: And a man can only work at one mill. So in March of '77 we had gotten a farm and I'd keep working at the farm while also working at the mill.

MB: How long was the farm....

NG: 10 acres in Abbotsford.

MB: How long did you keep the farm? Or do you still have it to this day?

NG: No, I sold that 3-4 years ago in 2010.

MB: 2010?

NG: I kept it till 2010. First we grew raspberries then blueberries.

MB: Um, now I will ask you about your earliest memories of working in the mill... how the treatment was towards you, how everything seemed to you, good or bad...

NG: Work in the mill was very hard. It did seem hard but in order to keep going we had to do it.

MB: What about it was difficult?

NG: The lumber, what we call the '*Phutey*' or lumber, it was heavy. It was long. When we had to pull it, it was very hard.

MB: So, it was very heavy work.

NG: Yes.

MB: And what was your job at the mill?

NG: When I first began working, I was what they call the green chain puller.

MB: Greenchain puller?

NG: Greenchain. Pulling of the lumber.

MB: And after that, what other kinds of jobs did you do at the mill?

NG: After that when I went to Wonnoc, I also did greenchain. After that, I learned grading- grading lumber.

MB: Grading?

NG: Yeah.

MB: Mhm.

NG: Then I began grading in '68-69.

MB: Okay.

NG: Lumber grading.

MB: Yes. So was there more after that?

NG: No, I continued grading lumber.

MB: Okay, so you kept grading lumber until you...

NG: Retired.

MB: Till you retired. Okay.

NG: And at the mill, whatever other little things there were too. If the foreman placed you here or you were placed there... but the main job was greenchain puller and grading.

MB: What does a greenchain puller do?

NG: He pulls the lumber.

MB: Okay.

NG: For example this table here, there are chains running.

MB: Yes.

NG: Like this. 6-7 chains are coming. The lumber is coming on this route. On one side the man is pulling and on the short side a man is pulling. So he is pulling it.

MB: Oh, okay. So that is one who is called a greenchain puller.

NG: They call him the greenchain puller.

Audio recorder got cut. Resuming questionnaire

MB: Okay, we will continue from here.

NG: Okay.

MB: So, just tell me again what lumber grading is.

NG: Lumber grading is that... I'm standing on one side, or whoever the grader is. On one side of the chain. When the lumber comes, they determine what grade the lumber goes in. If it's clear- the clear ones were worth more money.

MB: Clear?

NG: Clear. Clear number. One that doesn't have any knots or defects. So that gets marked as #1. And the other, second – the price is a bit lower. Then number two,

number three, number four. We had a chalk or a pen, and with that chalk we'd mark the lumber. The ones who work ahead in the greenchain will categorize them accordingly, according to the grade I marked.

MB: Okay. So it is a very important job.

NG: Very popular.

MB: Mhm. Who else worked at the mill of different background? 'Apney' or 'Gorey'- what other different people were there?

NG: Ah... at the Harman Sawmill, there were Apney and Gorey. There were less Gorey and more Apney.

MB: Okay, and Wonnoc Lumber?

NG: At Wonnoc Lumber, there were more Gorey and less Apney.

MB: Okay, and Bay Lumber?

NG: Bay Lumber too was the same, the Goreys and Apneys were mixed. There were more Goreys and less Apneys.

MB: So Harman Sawmill was Apna owned?

NG: Apna [East-Indian] man.

MB: And Wonnoc Lumber gora owned?

NG: That, gora owned.

MB: And Bay Lumber also gora owned?

NG: Bay Lumber too gora owned. It was a company, Bay Lumber. Wonnoc Lumber was a company too. The owner was American.

MB: Okay. And by working in the mill, what were some hardships or difficulties you faced?

NG: Back then it was just that it was hard work...

MB: Yes.

NG: And other than that, there weren't many hardships.

MB: So, then what were the advantages of working there?

NG: We were making money. Like, me working as a grader, I would get three dollars an hour more than others.

MB: Oh, okay.

NG: My job was... a qualified job.

MB: Mhm.

NG: And with that, I made a lot of money. With more money came better living.

MB: Mhm. And you said that in 1993 you retired...

NG: Yes.

MB: What was the date? Do you remember?

NG: The date... no I don't exactly remember...

MB: The month?

NG: I guess it must've been May or June.

MB: Okay. And the reason being for you leaving the job was that you had a heart problem and were about to undergo surgery...

NG: Yes, heart problem.

MB: Okay. And in order to become a citizen, did your job at the mill help you in any way?

NG: No. Then, after three years, one could become a Canadian citizen.

MB: Yes.

NG: And... I filled the forms and I received my Canadian citizenship.

MB: Yes. And my last question is about what the nature of living in Canada was like at the time. How was Canada back then?

NG: Canada, well now it's a little better but back then... living was getting money from the mill then going to the grocery store and getting groceries and whatever was leftover was deposited in the bank. That's what it was.

MB: Mhm. Um... and do you have any photos or papers from back then that we could use as copies?

NG: Passport, well...

MB: Citizenship too...

NG: There's a citizenship card that I have right now. And passport I have at home, if you ever say to bring it – it is a Canadian passport.

MB: Mhm. And any really old photos from back then of when you first arrived?

NG: Photos we used to capture, but after seeing them, we'd throw them away.

MB: Okay. Well that's all there was to our interview. Thank you very much for sitting with us.