

Ranjit Singh Nut Transcription
Interview Date: January 23rd, 2015

MB: What is your name?
RN: Ranjit Nut.
MB: When were you born?
RN: I don't know that.
KS: You must know the year though, at least.
RN: No. It's been a long time, I don't remember, because I haven't gone to school or gotten educated.
KS: When did you come here then?
RN: I don't remember. I think when my papers got completed, but then I got the other passport done. I even got my citizenship.
KS: What does it say on your passport then for your date?
RN: I don't remember what it says on my passport. I don't have my India passport.
KS: Show us your driver's license.
RN: I don't remember. But when I came I must've been older than 20.
KS: Older than 20?
RN: Yes. And since I've come here, I've been here for 45 years. And I live in Mission.
KS: You must've been 20-21 years old.
RN: Yeah, 20-21.
KS: What village are you from?
RN: My village is Rajoana. District, Ludhiana. It is near Halwara.
KS: Rajoana. Punjab.
RN: Yes. And it's by Raikot.
KS: Was your birth at that village?
RN: No, that was at my mother's pind at Burj.
KS: Where is that?
RN: That too is near Halwara. It's near our village.
MB: So did somebody sponsor you to come to Canada then?
RN: Yes, my sister sponsored me. Back then when they used to just fill out a form.
KS: Did you come by yourself?
RN: Yes, by myself.
KS: And your mom and dad were in India then.
RN: No, their form never got filled out, only mine did. But they did come after that. My wife too came later, 3 years later.
KS: You were married?
RN: No. I got married here.
MB: What did you do when you came here then?
RN: I was free for the first year. Back then lots of men had come and there wasn't much work. But after that I got started with working in the mill.
MB: What mill?
RN: It was Timberland Mill in Surrey.
MB: Do you remember what year it was that you worked in that mill?

RN: No, I don't remember at all. But I did work there for three years. Then I started working at Thomas mill at Port Coquitlam.

MB: Thomas what?

RN: Thomas. That's the name of the owner. There I worked 18 years.

KS: Thomas is the name of the owner, but do you remember the name of the mill?

RN: They used to just call it Thomas' mill.

MB: Where is that?

RN: At Port Coquitlam when you cross the bridge and there is a pub near there.

MB: Port Coquitlam?

RN: It is near Port Coquitlam. When you cross the bridge it's right by where the pub is. Sidhu used to work there with me too. We used to work together. And after that the mill stopped and I left.

MB: Oh, when the Thomas mill stopped? And you never went to the mill after that?

RN: No, then I got my compensation. I had gotten an operation on my knee. And then for 5 years, I figured the kids will take care of me so I stop working. The money was the same anyway.

MB: Yeah. What kind of mill was Timberland? A shingle one?

RN: No, it was a lumber wood mill and a plywood one too. I worked in the lumber side, I never worked in the plywood. I did three years there then at Thomas I did 18 years.

MB: And was this union or non-union?

RN: It was union.

MB: And what did you do there?

RN: First I worked on the chain, and I even did a little clean-up, but then I worked on the chipper.

MB: You did just 3 years there.

RN: Almost 19-20 years.

MB: No, at Timberland.

RN: At Timberland I did 3 years.

MB: Was Timberland union as well then?

RN: Yeah, that was a union too. And then I left that (Timberland) and got started here (Thomas).

MB: Was there a reason for leaving that?

RN: No, the reason was that one was farther and this one was closer. That was the only reason, no other thing. It was like not coming to Abbotsford. Then they laid me off and I started working in a junkyard in Chilliwack. Then I worked there for quite a few years. I worked there for 2 years in that junk and would pick out the copper.

MB: Is that when you left Timberland?

RN: No, that was when Thomas had laid me off. After 8 months. So then I did 1-2 years there (junkyard) and then Thomas called me back so then I did 19 years there. Then I left from there.

KS: Why had they laid you off?

RN: They had kept men and let go of some.

KS: The mill was still running then.

RN: Yes, it was still running. They had just let go of a few people. Then I started working in the junkyard in Chilliwack. That wasn't a union job though. They would just give us cash money. I did 2 years there and then the mil people called me back and insisted I come work for them again. So then I went back there and worked 19 years and then the mill shut down.

MB: Are you now a citizen or PR?

RN: Citizen.

MB: When did you become a citizen?

RN: It has been a long time since I've been a citizen. When I came, it used to be that you'd get it after 5 years, so I got it then. They had charged me \$5 and stamped my form then.

KS: Who filled out your form?

RN: A gora.

KS: The department people didn't fill out your form to become a citizen?

RN: No, he was a lawyer.

KS: So to fill out the form, the fee back then was \$5.

RN: Yeah, for the whole thing. But even \$5 was a lot, even that was hard to earn.

MB: And so there weren't any other mills then, just these two?

RN: I hadn't gone anywhere else, it was just these two.

MB: Okay. And how many apney were at Timberland? Was it a mix?

RN: There were lots of apney men there. Men from Surrey and men that came from Mission. They'd fill up a car and around 6 people would go together. Even at Thomas, we'd all carpool together and go from Mission.

MB: So how many apney and gorey were at Thomas then?

RN: There were few gorey there. There more mostly all apney. The men who worked on the green chain were apney and so were the ones who worked inside. It was all apney.

KS: You said that you would carpool together in the car to come to work. Did you live by yourself when you came here or who did you stay with?

RN: Here? Here I used to stay with my sister.

KS: And what about the other people?

RN: Oh, not them. Those were the people we worked with. We used to live in our own homes. I used to live with my sister and after that I got my own house since my wife was coming.

MB: When did you get married?

RN: I don't remember.

KS: You don't remember the dates, do you?

RN: No.

KS: After how many years would you say you got married?

RN: After three years of coming here.

KS: So after three years of coming here and you had sent for your wife to come here.

RN: Yes, yes.

MB: Did somebody find the jobs for you or did you apply by yourself in the mill?

RN: There was a man who got me working in the mill.

MB: From the beginning?

RN: First he had me somewhere else for 7 months and I had gotten laid off there. That will was run by somebody else, it had blocks and things. And he asked a man from Mission that I used to go with, if wanted to work since there were lots of men there. And so he got me working there. Then I thought to myself that this is closer. And so when I got laid off he said come back, and so I did. I know all the work, about logging and all the mills. When the mill stopped, I got a phone call to come back and work but I said no, I don't want to work anymore. Then I got my pension 5 years ago.

MB: You got your pension 5 years ago?

RN: Yes.

MB: Okay, so in 2010.

RN: Yeah. Well, I had the money, what's there to say. My wife still works today.

KS: You were 60 years old then.

RN: When?

KS: When you got your pension 5 years ago.

RN: My compensation case was running for a while and that had taken quite a long time.

KS: For what reason was your worker's compensation case running? Did you get injured?

RN: I had two operations on my knee. It had broken.

KS: Because of work?

RN: Yes, at work. A piece of wood had fallen on it and it cracked. And for quite a long time my case was running, regarding the money and everything. So after that, I never went back to them to work... There were lots of old apney men that have been working at the mills.

KS: When people were coming from India, where were they mostly working at?

RN: At the mills.

KS: They weren't looking for work in the farm then?

RN: There weren't any farms! There weren't even any berries harvested. Mission had few apney houses too. There were Braich houses and Cheemayan's houses, there was nothing else. Now it's quite crowded but back then it was empty. Even in the town, there were few men.

KS: So for anyone coming from India, the mill would be the first work of choice.

RN: Yes, the mill.

KS: Were they finding work themselves?

RN: No, no. If anybody knew me, they'd just say come here and work with me.

MB: So did you know before coming from India that you'd be working in the mill?

RN: No, no. I had no idea about what would happen and what wouldn't.

KS: What did you do in India before then?

RN: I was doing agricultural work.

KS: With your father?

RN: Yes. My father wasn't working though, I was... I'll tell you. I was around 11-12 years old when I began working.

KS: When you began farming and doing agricultural work in the village.

RN: Then I left it and was free for a year, and after that I continued working.

KS: So what made you feel like wanting to come to Canada?

RN: No. My sister was here and she had sent a form for me.

KS: You must've felt like coming too, though.

RN: Anyone's going to feel like coming. Our Bhua's son (cousin) was here too and so were here daughters.

KS: Tell us a little bit about what they'd say about life in Canada.

RN: They'd say it's a very great life. But you only come to know when you come here. When you see a picture you think it's good, but afterwards..

KS: You had to work hard.

RN: Yes that we had to work hard.

KS: How did you feel when you came to Canada?

RN: I didn't feel much.

KS: You didn't like it?

RN: No, it wasn't that I didn't like it, but I just didn't feel the need to go back to India. Or when I began working, it wasn't that I felt that I was in much difficulty – no.

KS: So you didn't feel like it was hard. You thought it was good.

RN: I thought it was good and I was doing the work. I used to get around \$300 every 2 weeks.

KS: For 2 weeks? How much did you get hourly?

RN: I think around \$2.50 - \$5. \$5 was later though but when I started it was \$2.50.

KS: How did you feel about Canada since you came from India?

RN: I thought it was good. We were able to eat our roti and send money back to India. It was going to seem good **laughs**

KS: How was your life in India then?

RN: I was doing farming. You already know how life is there.

KS: But regarding money. Did you have money there?

RN: No, money was always tight there. Because our father wasn't working.

KS: So by coming here you thought the earnings were good.

RN: What about the earnings? You'd have to work no matter what! When a man comes here, if he doesn't work, he'll die starving.

KS: Besides the earnings, did you enjoy the other aspects of Canada?

RN: I did. I met good men and the good and everything was good. No, others are into drinking, but I'm not even interested in that. I've never smoked a cigarette or drank alcohol. Now it's been five years since I've gotten my pension and I still haven't drank. Some people here you see have just passed by drinking alcohol.

KS: And when you were living here, where did you get your groceries from?

RN: There was a store in town near the mill.

KS: Here? What about Punjabi groceries?

RN: In Mission. Punjabi groceries were always purchased from Vancouver.

KS: What about what you ate at home?

RN: It was roti.

KS: You used to get that from Vancouver?

RN: From Vancouver.

KS: What store?

RN: It was downtown, just one store. We'd all go there together in a car.

KS: Did you have your own car?

RN: No.

KS: When did you get your own car?

RN: I don't remember. But it had taken quite a while. When I didn't have money, where was I to get a car from?

KS: You got it after your family came here.

RN: Yes, after. My wife had come.

KS: And how cold was it then?

RN: It was very cold.

KS: In comparison to now?

RN: Double.

KS: When you came from India, did you feel a big difference? What month was it when you came from India?

RN: I don't remember.

KS: Was it the summer or winter?

RN: It could have been the summer, I think. It wasn't cold then. The mills used to stall for 6 months when it snowed that badly.

MB: Was your work outdoors then?

RN: There would be a roof. The mills would stall, they wouldn't work, and it was that cold! Everything would freeze over. A guy, whose mill is here (in Mission) was able to drive his car over the water. That's how much it was frozen over and cold. The bridge has been a recent addition but we used to go over the railway track. We used to drive our cars through there.

KS: the River that you're talking about, is it Fraser River?

RN: Yes, this one here in Mission.

KS: It used to freeze over and you guys would drive your cars over it.

RN: Yes, this gora would. And the railway track here would have cars driving on it. The bridge has been built recently.

KS: And for going to Vancouver, was this train here then or no?

RN: No.

KS: So how were you going to Vancouver? By car?

RN: Yeah, we'd go in our cars. Back then, all the men had little money and cars. Even Paul Singh, whose death just happened recently, lived a difficult time too. We used to work but weren't able to make much money.

KS: And when you were working in the mill, how was the relationship between one another?

RN: It was very good. If anybody came from India, we'd feed you roti and give you chai, but now the times have changed. Now it's...

KS: In the mill are there more apney working then?

RN: More apney.

KS: Were there people from other countries as well?

RN: There were people from other countries. There were lots of Japanese, apney, and gorey. There were few gorey though. When I first started working, there was nobody.

You could count the number of men that were in Mission. There weren't even any homes in Abbotsford.

KS: Did you have any problems, if it was communicating or anything, with the gorey?

RN: No, the conversation was always direct, they didn't talk too much. We could talk to the gorey but wouldn't have a great understanding. I couldn't say much but after a while, you begin to learn how to say a few things.

KS: So did you learn English after?

RN: Yes. Then I started bringing in the logs by boat.

KS: For work?

RN: Yes, for work. But when I stopped working then I didn't.

KS: What kind of jobs did you do? You worked on the green chain and even rode the boat.

RN: I even worked on the chipper and clean up as well! **Laughs** Whatever work there was. Because it was a union, I did many things. Now I haven't done anything else in farming, only in the mills.

KS: And did you find life to be easy?

RN: It was easy to me. I don't know how it was for the goras but my life was great. Here one can even wear nice clothes and everything can be done. But there in India, you know how it is for the landowners. There are landowners here too, but they walk around in dirt and filth.

KS: So working in the mill was cleaner.

RN: Yes. Work was just 5 days and the other 2 days we were free.

KS: And when you had your 2 days off, what did you do?

RN: Nothing.

KS: Did you go roaming around anywhere?

RN: I didn't go anywhere! There used to be movies playing in Abbotsford, then we began to go there.

KS: Which theatre?

RN: The one past the freeway, we used to go there.

KS: In town? Town Cinema?

RN: Yes, it's past the farms.

KS: And so when you worked on the weekdays, weekends you'd stay at home, but what else?

RN: On the weekend we'd go to the Gurdwara.

KS: Which one?

RN: Abbotsford.

KS: The old heritage one?

RN: Yes, it was just that one. There were a few people who'd get together and eat some roti and do some seva.

KS: On the weekends? And did you ever celebrate any special occasions?

RN: We did but it was at the Gurdwaras.

KS: What kinds of days?

RN: I don't know, I can't say.

KS: Like a Gurpurb? Diwali, Vaisakhi?

RN: No, we hadn't even heard of Diwali or Vaisakhi. It has only started happening recently.

KS: What about weddings?

RN: Weddings used to happen here.

KS: Where you'd make your sweets.

RN: No. It happened at the Gurdwara. There used to be a man from Dhudike, I think his name was Ram Lal – he used to make them. Whether it was sweets or rice, he'd make it. I think there was another man too, and he'd make rice and lentils as well.

KS: For the weddings, he'd make it.

RN: For weddings there would just be 4-5 people, there weren't even that many that would attend.

KS: You'd invite everyone?

RN: We'd invite everyone?

KS: Like everyone in the village?

RN: Even the people we didn't know, we'd still give a card out and invite them. Like even the people in Abbotsford.

KS: Where did you get your cards printed?

RN: In Mission, the Gurdwara. There is a machine made and you write what you need to and the machine continues printing it. First you write one and then they go on.

KS: Do you want to tell us any story you have of working in the mill, bad or good?

RN: No, I don't remember anything. It was work to home.

KS: If you remember any experience.

RN: I don't remember any experience. It was just that you'd work and you'd come home.

KS: Did you work all your years in union mills?

RN: In union.

KS: Did you feel like by working in the mill, after your wedding, your work was considered to be well off?

RN: In the union, if the owner considers you good, you yourself become good. The owner used to consider me that.

KS: Did everyone consider you to be good? Like some jobs have more respect than others.

RN: We have lots of relatives here. We were all relatives here and cousins with one another.

KS: So amongst yourselves, it was considered respectable that you were working in the mill.

RN: Yes. That he is working in the mill and earning his own roti.

KS: When they were looking for arranging your marriage, your job was considered good?

RN: Yes. Because any man who works in the mill was considered to be able to bring home the roti for the rest of his life. This type of work wouldn't just end or have you laid off. It wasn't like, "well this company is going to shut down tomorrow or this nursery is going to stall." It didn't seem like that to me. Even now I'm happy. I don't work. I don't

have to fill my tank with gas. I tell my wife to fill it up and my cars standing there. Whenever I need to go anywhere or Abbotsford, it's like that.

KS: And your family, your children, stayed on the right path and became good citizens?

RN: Yes. They are both married, my eldest son here and my daughter married in Abbotsford, related to Mohinder Singh Gill. There is one son still who is to be married and he works on the railway.

KS: And your relationship with the gorey was always okay?

RN: Yes, we had good relationships with the gorey. The gorey used to call me Uncle. I was good with everyone. I didn't have conflict with anyone. I'd go to all the weddings and everything. It wasn't as if I wasn't going to go.

KS: So tell me, where did funerals take place then?

RN: In Vancouver.

KS: There wasn't a funeral hall in Mission or Abbotsford?

RN: No. They have been built now. The one in Vancouver was on Maine Street – we used to go there. There wasn't anything there. There wasn't even this, the idea of going to a Langar later.

KS: So after a funeral happened, everyone would go back to their homes.

RN: Now people go to each other's homes and have chai later. I had never done that in all my time. But now they keep on adding onto things.

KS: Okay, that's good Uncle. Thank you.