

Sukhdarshan Singh Gill Transcription
Interview Date: November 21st, 2014

SB: Uncle Ji what is your full name?

SG: Sukhdarshan Singh Gill.

SB: What is your date of birth?

SG: January 8, 1943.

SB: Where were you born?

SG: East Punjab, India. Village Dhudike.

SB: When did you come to Canada? What date?

SG: 1968, October 31st.

SB: What was your immigration status when you came to Canada? Did you come by point system?

SG: I came by Points basis.

SB: What is your immigration status now? Are you a citizen or..?

SG: I am a Canadian citizen. Retired.

SB: Before you came to Canada, where did you live?

SG: In India I was studying in college. I did Pre-university. I had two brothers here. One was working in immigration in Sumas. My older brother...we were 5 brothers. There was a court system by the government...the government allowed immigration in groups. They said your bigger brother has already applied and will probably get it. They told him your younger brother she be single, studying, working and then you can sponsor him. My older brother who is sitting outside, Harnek Singh Gill, sent me a Declaration. I did a radio mechanic course. When I made my passport I wrote down radio mechanic assistant as my occupation. I came here, immigration told me you are educated, you're a mechanic, you should go to school. He gave me the documentation after a week my brother told me we didn't have a home in Canada because he had been sending the money he earned back to India. In India, we didn't have land, we had two single sisters, my mother and our older brother supported us. So I asked him how we make a house here. He said we need a bit of money. I told him I'm free to work, I can start tomorrow and give you the money. He said don't worry we will pick up a loan on your name from the bank and use the loan \$2000, \$3000 and buy a house. And that's what we did. The house was in his name and we got a house. In November he said I will send you to work. I said send me anywhere. He said you free in India here you need to learn how to make roti. He said I will send you to Merritt. We lived in Mission at the time. Another man living in Mission at the time was

the caretaker in a Merritt mill so he dropped me off in Merritt, Najjar was his name. He said people learn to work here and then run off. They put me on graveyard shift. I would wake up to go to work at midnight and sleep during the day. For three days they made roti for me and after that the older men said, young man you aren't here visiting your massi you need to learn how to make roti. I said teach me, I've never made it before. There was an older man who spoke in Urdu a lot, his name was Mewa Singh and he taught me how to make roti. He said I'm going to the bathroom to take a shower, before I get back put 4 cups of whole wheat flour in a bowl and some water. I put in too much water and couldn't make the flour. I was worried he was going to come back and give me heck so I sat there. He came back and said you look mad young man what you are thinking. And then he taught me how to make roti.

SB: Uncle Ji do you remember the name of the Merritt mill?

SG: No.

SB: What type...was it a saw mill or shake and shingle?

SG: Saw mill.

SB: What work did you start at in the mill?

SG: Pulling lumber. Green chain.

SB: Did you try finding work elsewhere at that time?

SG: No, no I started there first.

SG: No, no. You don't know the situation. So many of our men worked there, spoke Punjabi. Then the pay was \$2.50. I would make \$20 in 8 hours.

SB: Was that a good salary for that time?

SG: Huh?

SG: At that time, things [we needed to buy] were cheaper. Pay was good considering.

SG: No, no the salary was good but I didn't have any other job.

SG: We didn't have any other choice. When the phone would come from the foreman for overtime...we wanted overtime, to make more money, right. My brother would pick up the phone and ask me if I wanted to go to work. I would go. In overtime you would make \$30 for 8 hours.

SB: Uncle Ji how long did you stay in the Squamish mill?

SG: I worked there for a year and 9 months. After that a strike happened. The strike occurred for 9 months.

SB: Do you remember why the strike happened?

SG: No, the strike happened for 9 months and then our mama lived in Mission and told us to come there. I went there and got a job in Squamish. I worked in Squamish for 6 months.

SB: Uncle Ji do you remember the name of that mill? The Squamish one?

SG: No I don't remember the name of the Squamish mill. I worked there for 6 months and after that Whonnock in Mission.

SB: What are some memories from mill times? Share some of your stories with us.

SG: We would make food ourselves. I didn't know how to make roti and they said you have to do something so I learned how to make the flour.

SB: Like Langar.

SG: Yup. You would put them there and when you wanted to eat roti you would pick them up from there also.

SB: What would you eat? Just roti and sabji or Canadian food too?

SG: Roti, Sabzi chicken, tari...we ate roti and sabji. There were maybe a few people that took break to the mill but everyone else took roti.

SB: Hardly anyone took bread, most people took roti?

SG: Yes.

SB: You would take your food with you?

SG: Yes, in lunch-kits.

SB: Did you celebrate Indian holidays like lodhi, Diwali?

SG: No not really there weren't enough of us.

SB: When you needed to buy lentils, where would you get them from?

SG: Lentils we could get from the one store in Vancouver. All of the Indians that lived in BC would buy things from that store.

SB: Do you remember the name of the store?

SG: No I don't remember the name. There was only one store for Indians. No other store.

SB: Was your relationship with your fellow coworkers in the mill good?

SG: It was good! There was no fighting like there is now.

SB: Did gorey work?

SG: Yes they did.

SB: Any other demographics?

SG: It was a mix. In Squamish and even Merritt there were gorey and Indian both.

SB: Were there Chinese men or just gorey and Indian men?

SG: Gorey and Punjabi men.

SB: So no other denominations?

SG: No. There were very few Chinese men. Maybe one here and there, maybe none.

SB: What did you find hard about working in the mill?

SG: In the shingle mill we were working and making money, there was nothing that was hard. We were young, we did piece work.

SB: Uncle Ji when did you leave the mill work? What year?

SG: In 2001.

SB: Would you like to tell us anything else?

SG: No nothing.

SB: That's all.