

Sukhwinder (Sukh) Cheema Transcription

Interview Date: January 26, 2015

SB: Alright. What is your name?

SC: Sukhwinder Cheema. I use Sukh as uh my regular name.

SB: Awesome umm what is your birth year and place of birth?

SC: Place of birth is Malerkotla, District Sangrur. I was born in 1966 and February the 2nd.

SB: When did you immigrate to Canada?

SC: I immigrated to Canada in 1969 and I believe the month was January/February because there was snow on the ground. I don't know the exact date.

SB: Umm what's your immigration status currently?

SC: I'm a Canadian citizen.

SB: What was your immigration status when you first came here?

SC: I would have been a landed immigrant. I became a Canadian citizen in 1972.

SB: Umm ok where did you live like specifically before you came to Canada?

SC: Umm in...It's... it's called Malian. It's in district Sangrur.

SB: So same place you were born?

SC: Yeah where I was born yeah.

SB: Ok. And did you work before you came here?

SC: I was only three.

SB: Oh ok that makes sense. Did you work in the mill when you came here?

SC: I worked in. Oh I grew up here going to school here but then when I was 16 I worked part time in the sawmills and then in the summers sometimes I'd get a job for a couple of months.

KS: So you came on family sponsorship Visa? How you came to Canada?

SC: Well my dad was sponsored by his brother...my Taya Ji . And then after three years I guess he got enough money to bring us over and sponsored me, my mom, and my sister.

KS: So your dad sponsored you people as a family.

SC: Yeah, the three of us came.

KS: Which year?

SC: 1969.

SB: Umm Ok. And then umm do you remember the first mill that you worked at when you were sixteen?

SC: Yeah it was called Watkins Shake and Shingle.

SB: Do you remember where it was?

SC: Yeah. It's in Whonnock All the mills basically were all in Whonnock other than a couple of them that were in Mission.

KS: So you worked there as a part time or... or like that time you were a student?

SC: Yeah. I was 16 I started working in sawmill when I was in Grade 11.

KS: As a part time job while going to school?

SC: Once a week, on a Friday night...whenever they could call me. Then my Taya Ji, my second cousin, they bought a mill and then in that mill I used to work every weekend

KS: What is his name? Your Taya Ji's?

SC: Uhhhh... they have a blueberry farm here and he's not my dad's brother, he's my dad's first cousin. Our grandfathers are brothers. So their last name is Cheema and his son's name is Gurpreet, Gordie Cheema and they have a blueberry cannery out here but I'd have to- Ajmer...Ajmer Singh?

SB: Yeah so you worked in his mill?

SC: Yeah.

SB: Do you remember the name of his mill by any chance?

SC: No I could get it for you, I could phone Gord but no it was just this tiny one it was like a family operation.

SB: Do you remember where it was located?

SC: Yeah that was just in Mission.

SB: Umm--

SC: ---I ended up working for 5 different mills just because everybody knew me and they would phone me when they needed a spare person because I could do a lot of the different jobs. So I worked for Scott Cedar Products, Meeker Cedar, Watkins Mill, Wonnick Shake and Shingle...and then my uncle's mill which I don't remember the name. So five

KS: As a part time student job?

SC: Yeah.

KS: On weekends.

SC: Yeah because if you worked at like McDonald's you made \$3.50 an hour. When you worked at the saw mills you made about \$14 dollars an hour back then.

KS: Which year?

SC: 1982 to about 86.

SB: Do you remember what position you started at for your first mill job?

SC: Yeah it's called block piling. Most of the mills were shake and shingle mills where they take a log and saw it to about this big (gestures with hands) and then you basically grab it with your hands and put it on one of the tables then that's all it takes and the slicer comes in like this (gestures with hand) and makes pieces about that wide (gestures with hands) and they saw those on an angle and that's how you get the shingles for your roof. Or shakes.

SB: Did you work at block piling at the other mill jobs?

SC: Yeah and then they...then as you progress you make a bit more money. It's called packing. So what you're doing is when those shingles go down a chute they sit in a big bin and then you just pack them in to bundles this big (gestures with hands) and then you take a metal strap and you strap it up and throw it on the chain and then do the next one.

SB: So was that a trend that students of your age used to work in the mills as part time?

SC: They tried very hard to get in. I mean the only way you got in is if your dad and the boss or somebody knew somebody. You could apply a hundred times...you're not going to get the job. I got in because my dad worked there, my uncle worked there...and the one time...the one or two times they got me in then I would work really hard so I was a good worker then the guys would call me. And then word spread that you know you phone this guy he is a good spare. Then I got my name around a bunch of sawmills. A lot of my friends didn't work because you couldn't get a job there. It was very hard.

KS: So what was the trend where students used to work? For example, these days' students work in the mall or McDonalds or food joints. What was the trend those days?

SC: The trend 100% for apney was berry picking.

KS: Ok.

SC: In the summer. Picking strawberries. And picking blueberries. And raspberries and blueberries. I even one time went with my mom and we picked daffodils. Like you would cut the daffodils in bunches we did that even in Langley for a week or two.

KS: Ok working in the mills for student as part time was not that common.

SC: Not common.

KS: Because you were hard working.

SC: Well...and you had to know somebody.

KS: Ok.

SC: Because there was enough people looking for work.

SB: So when you were 16 what factors contributed to you looking for mill work? Cause there were all those other options as a student.

SC: There wasn't a lot of options for students though. You know the other option there was a cannery and it was predominantly apney. And the apney kids would work there the gorey kids wouldn't. The gorey kids would tend to go to...you know try to get a job at McDonald's so there was a McDonald's in Mission. And you know maybe retail but there wasn't much retail. So you know they would have summer vacations. They would go away for 2-3 weeks with their parents but we didn't right. So the other job was canneries where you know they just...like it sounds: canning food. Then you would be putting cans in boxes or putting beans down a chute or picking rocks out of a chain or whatever there was lots of different jobs. But I would say in that factory in Haney we used to go I would bet you it was 90% apney. Ladies...lots of ladies.

KS: And daffodil? Or cannery?

SC: No, cannery. See that's where my mom and they worked too. In the Mission cannery.

KS: So that's interesting when umm gorey kids would go for vacation during the summer and...you people worked in the mills. Hard work...because your parents were hard working?

SC: And we didn't have it in our culture to go on a vacation. Like now it's in our culture. Everyday says what are you doing in the summer? We're going to Disneyland or maybe we're going camping. Back then summer came it was ok to put the kids to work. Let's try to make some money right.

KS: Which years are you talking?

SC: 19- I'd say we started... we were picking berries with my mom when we were probably 8..7-8 years old. And so that would be '73-'74 all the way up to '84. About that 10 years.

SB: Umm that first job when you were 16...Who ended up finding you that job? Your father and your Taya Ji?

SC: Yeah. My dad.

SB: Umm what is your first memory of working in the mill? Do you remember the early days when you first started?

SC: Yeah, yeah. My first memory is that everybody who worked there, especially my dad and them, they were all good buddies. They were all friends hey. And so my dad would work...sometimes I'd work the opposite shift of my dad---like there was an afternoon shift and a day shift--- and they worked two weeks days shift and then you switch then you work two weeks afternoon and you go back and forth. And I remember working opposite sometimes and his friends were there and they would just be so nice to me and try to help even though they didn't need to be and you know on a Friday you shut down early and you know give me a couple of beers and say we won't tell your dad. Here you go, here you go. The friendship of the mill workers was incredible. Nobody was trying to think they were better than the other guy they worked as a family. My dad's uncles and their buddies. They're still all friends from what 30 years ago.

SB: Having worked in 5 or so mills. Is that the general thing at every single mill or was that just at the mill you worked with your father?

SC: Umm that mill more particularly because there was longevity. They were all just there for 20 years right. But the other ones it was okay. Not as close because I didn't know as many people at the other mills whereas at this mill it was all these buddies that you know would come to your house so you'd see them for akhand path or whatever or a birthday party right. Yeah that was good. And then just you know what they enjoyed themselves. As hard as they worked, I think it was a time they just didn't mind it there was no stress on them when they were at the mill. Just worked hard.

KS: Even though there was hard work- Physical hard work- still they enjoyed their life?

SC: Yeah.

KS: And when you wanted to work in the mill was it a compulsion from your parents or you wanted to work in the mill yourself? To do the work hard? Voluntary?

SC: It was sort of...no, I think it was sort of umm in our culture. As you saw them and every summer you worked and then you got excited you didn't have to pick berries and make 4 times, 5 times the amount of money in one day right and go work. No we didn't really have any other choice. It just became a part of your life. Working as apney growing up I don't know one apna family that said you knew we're going for a two week vacation. Even one week. One day was hard enough for us, right. So yeah the holidays just wasn't there. And it's gone the opposite right. You know now my mom and dad will have a party and stuff and she's feeling not great so she'll just get a caterer to cook all the food right and we just go pick it up right.

SB: Do you remember who else worked at the mills? The owners and the workers, ethnically what groups did they tend to belong to?

SC: Unless the mill was owned by apney, all the hierarchy was white. I never saw one Indian boss.

SB: When it is owned by white people the bosses will be white. When it is owned by apney people the bosses will be..

SC: Apney, yup.

SB: The majority of the workers that were working in positions like block piling or on the green chain umm were the demographics the same that way as well?

SC: No, no because it was a good job for a white person as well. It paid well right. So you when I worked at sawmill I'd say at the time probably close to 50/50...50% white, 50% apney.

SB: At most of the mills or just the main one you worked at?

SC: The main one...you see there were two types of mills too right. The apney...sorry at the time the mill you would want to work at was the unionized mill. The unionized mill you knew you were going to go and get paid \$14 an hour. Well if I went to go work at my Taya Ji's mill, I was getting paid \$8 an hour for the same job.

KS: So that was not unionized?

SC: No. So there was times when...remember when my dad said there was a strike in Merritt? And then he moved to Vancouver? That was because they weren't getting paid enough and they went on strike. There was a couple of times, I saw it once when my dad and they were working at Wonnick and they were trying to unionize a couple of the apney mills. And they knew some people who worked at these mills but they had to stay with the union because that's who took care of their wages. I remember being out there one day and this strike was only a couple of hours...but the swearing and the cursing it was really eye-opening because you know they were saying to the apney you guys are ruining it for us because now you guys are paying \$8/hour when you should be paying 10, 11, 12 and they tried to keep it un-unionized and it would hurt their product even though the only guy getting rich in the apna mill was the apna owner because he's making more profit. Where my dad's mills were running fine and they were getting paid fair. Apney did drive the wages down and then when you did work for an apna mill you didn't get paid as well. But if you got a job at a unionized mill, it was almost like someone threw you a party. You got full benefits too right.

SB: So even apney people preferred to work in gora owned mills? Because it was more paid and unionized.

SC: Absolutely. Yes and more benefits.

SB: With the difference between the unionized mills and apney mills being—tending to not be unionized, was there any kind of racial tension because of that?

SC: Umm yeah, I think so. I don't think it was publicly said but I think some of the white people who used to work at sawmills weren't too happy with how the apney would get in to that industry and ruin the wages. It was never verbally said but you could feel it a bit. I could feel it.

KS: Any other nationalities working other than Indians and whites? Other nationalities?

SC: No that's funny when you asked that the other day and I kept thinking...no Chinese. Chinese used to work...When I went to BCIT I knew when I was talking to some Chinese fellow similar to me he had immigrated with his family and they sort of went in to the fish factories. Right they started to work in fishing and stuff while the apney were in the logging business.

KS: Any Japanese?

SC: No, none. That's Mission though. Different demographics in Vancouver. Because Mission didn't really even have very many Chinese people. So it could be different in Vancouver.

SB: Do you have any day in the life stories of like working in the mills? Anything interesting that you would like to share?

SC: Uh let me think. I just know when you did work there for a full day and you got your pay cheque you felt like you earned it because you worked hard right? You felt pretty good but no just I just enjoyed working with dad's buddies, uncles, and stuff. Because they took care of you know. On a Friday night some of them...sometimes on a Friday night, one guy would not work and...well not work but he'd be out cooking some "bakra" (goat) on a thing because you know they'd bring out a bottle of whiskey and just have a bit of food and just enjoy and they still did their job.

KS: So where they used to cook?

SC: Oh just put it on a little hot plate or something.

KS: In the mill?

SC: Yeah, yeah. Not very often, just once in a while.

KS: Sometimes to celebrate on a pay day?

SC: Yeah and the only other memory is just I remember just how hard they had to work and I was so glad when the mill actually shut down and it forced all my dad and them to go to a lumber mill in New West for the last...so he would have been about 50. So the last 15 years of his mill life was really easy because it was all automated and it was just pushing buttons. It was a social club. Yeah you had to have someone there to watch in case something got stuck or push the button and check the chain and duh, duh, duh.

KS: In which year?

SC: About 19-...we probably shut that down in 84. About '90. Not even '90...about '90, '91. About then, yeah. And then there job was really easy. Then they just got paid per hour. Piece work was not there anymore. So they got paid a little less but the last 15 years they didn't do any physical labor. It was really good. That was good.

KS: For how many years did you do this mill work?

SC: Uh till I started going back to school. 'Till about 19-... I did until about... about 4 years. 4 years yeah. Summers, evenings, whenever I could.

KS: Your grade 10 to...?

SC: First year in...I actually went here [UFV] for one year, then I went to BCIT. Then I stopped. I got a real job.

KS: For four years then you start your university at BCIT?

SC: Yeah.

KS: Then you stopped working in the mill?

SC: Yeah, then I got other jobs.

SB: Is that what lead you to leave the mill work, just finding other work?

SC: Yeah, I didn't want to do that. But I always knew I was going to go to university or BCIT. I mean but back then you couldn't vision everything that's out there and I remember one of the teachers telling me and I said come on, I remember one of the profs at BCIT said to, this was in 1986, he says 50% of the jobs that you guys...that will be out there haven't even been invented yet...in the next 10 years. And you're thinking what he is talking about because technology was just changing right. Like the technology field, the IT department there wasn't any. You know one or two people. Our company we got an IT department of 70 right you know. There was no fax machines and all that stuff opened up while different areas of gaming. Like one of my cousins is an engineer for EA Sports. None of that existed and you couldn't fathom that 50% of the jobs hadn't even been created. And I said that to my son today thinking 50% of the jobs in 10 years aren't here yet. And then you think what could it be? But it'll happen. That was really interesting.

KS: So do you have any interesting memories of mill time? What you used to eat other than cooking bakra?

When I worked with my dad he would have 2 rotis, maybe a roti and a half and his sabji and I was 16 like my son now who eats 3 times as much as I do, I would have 4 rotian and 2 sabjian and my tea and stuff and a pop. And all the other guys would be like really he eats that much right. And now I look at my son, if I have one hamburger, he's 16 he has 3.

KS: So that's what you would carry in your lunch box?

SC: My mom would make it.

KS: While going to the mill you would carry rotian, sabjian?

SC: Yup. Yeah. I would have roti and sabji all the time and what they did is it would be in tin foil and because the mill in certain areas would get heated. Just by...there's heaters and stuff so you would just throw your tin foil on the tray...it is not even a tray just a...where the chips went in to a burner there was an area that would just get warm. Throw your roti there about 10...depends when your lunch was right if it was evening it would be 8 o'clock at night and then by the time lunch came it would be nice and warm.

KS: So what was your life other than going in to the mill, going to the school? Like any sports?

SC: Oh yeah I played basketball for 15 years. I played one year here and then all of high school. My mom and dad the one thing they never said for us not to do was play sports. So as much as yeah we work, work, work. Anytime we did a school sport we went on any school trips and stuff that was 100% right. So it was never an issue you know dad I'm going to play for the basketball team. No, no I need you to work at sawmill. No. It's the one thing 100% my sister played baseball and my younger brother played soccer. I played soccer for one year but mainly basketball and we did that a lot. Played out of Mission.

KS: Which school did you go?

SC: Mission Secondary. There was only one school back then. Yeah, I coached baseball and my sister's team when she was 16.

KS: So what used to be the social life like celebration of our festivals?

SC: We didn't even do that back then.

KS: No?

SC: That just maybe started about 10 years ago. We never celebrated Vaisakhi and stuff before in Mission.

KS: So how this transition happened? So you have lived from your childhood to now and you said it never happened before so what was stopping it or why it was not happening?

SC: Yes. When we grew up in Mission on the street we lived on we were the only apna family and nobody moved and so it was always the people, same old people. You maybe knew maybe one other group and I bet you, in the whole town of Mission there was maybe 6-8 families. And now there's probably thousands. Maybe a few hundred families. It wasn't like Surrey where there was a parade and they celebrated and stuff so back then I didn't even know what Vaisakhi was until the past 20 years. So the only celebrations we would do when we were younger was Christmas and birthday parties. And birthday parties I remember to this day was the big 4L gallon of ice cream and the cake and think you'd excited to get a birthday present but everyone just gave you money. And so you couldn't really do anything with it. Now it's so different right. And my dad and then would have friends that would just come over on weekends and there thing was just they would have a few shots of whiskey and eat some food and play some cards. Never poker just some of the Indian games

KS: So what about the weddings? How used to be the weddings here?

SC: Yeah well my sister got married in...it's funny eh my sister got married in 1983 and back then all the ladies come to my mom's house and make Mathai for a week and they make samosa and then I remember even going when she got married in Merritt and I remember to this day that her whole of her wedding with the reception and everything was \$3000. Well my nephew, her son, just got married...two of them, both of them and the cost of decorating the hall was \$8000.

KS: That is now?

SC: Yeah.

KS: So your sister got married in which year?

SC: In 1983. '84...'84.

KS: '84.

SC: Yeah and now I've got two nephews that are 29 and 27. She had an arranged marriage. So the fellow was from Merritt and then we went to Merritt you know they make a few phone calls. Is this a good family? Yup. You're a good family? Yup. Ok you guys are getting married.

KS: So how was socially and economically considered as working in the mill. What was the socioeconomic status of people? Like considered as good or...

SC: You know what? It was considered as good because we didn't really have any other people around us. My dad didn't grow up around a lot of educated people. Most of social circle was all mill people. You know.

KS: It was considered as good?

SC: Yeah. Especially since when you were in a white, union mill. You like won the lottery because you got paid more you got better benefits. Yeah the one thing I said that day is it still happens today the apney still don't eat in the same lunch room as gorey. Maybe it doesn't happen today I don't know but back then still that was one thing that I found odd cause I grew up with all the white people so when I used to work at the other mills I used to go for lunch and I would take my lunch-kit when I didn't know anybody and I would go in to the lunch room and I'd be the only apna in the lunch room all the rest were all gorey. The apney just sat in the mill and ate their lunches.

KS: Why was that, what do you think?

SC: I think they were more comfortable sitting in the mill instead of trying to socialize with the gorey.

KS: Because of the language or...?

SC: Yeah, I think s—

KS: --Or because of our food smell?

SC: Language maybe and a little bit embarrassed- well not embarrassed but maybe you feel a little uncomfortable with the food. You know?

KS: But did gorey ever said we don't like your food?

SC: No, no one ever said that, no.

KS: It was just their own--

SC: --preference, yeah. It was never...and I just think it was more comfortable for them to just you know if there is a pallet there to just put their lunch there and put a couple blocks of wood and sit there chit- chatting. And I think they were more comfortable speaking in Punjabi too instead of in the lunch room with the gorey there you know so because there was...as much as there was gorey they kept to themselves but there was always that little bit of tension you know. You could always feel it.

KS: Can you share what kind of tension?

SC: You know there was still a divide.

KS: Social divide?

SC: Yeah, social divide. They sort of kept to themselves. They didn't really bother each other. You know them, sort of all on their own and kept to themselves. You know in the sawmill they would talk to each other fine but when there was coffee breaks and lunch breaks and stuff they all kind of separated in to their own little corners. But no words were ever exchanged or anything bad. But they socially hadn't come together yet. Where now you know everybody you talk to gorey oh your butter chicken oh this, that, and the food thing. And now we've become more educated. My dad can speak, he can keep a conversation going with a gora whereas back then it was very basic. Right he has learned English.

KS: So even after the mill hours so gorey and apney did they socialize with each other?

SC: No.

KS: Because of the language?

SC: Yeah and just different social groups. There was no socializing at all. My dad had no gorey friends. Whereas I had all gorey friends because I only grew up with gorey.

KS: In the mill also?

SC: No, in the mill I didn't really have friends they were all older. They talked to me fine. "Eh Sukh your Calvin's kid eh? Yeah, yeah. But I wasn't going to be seen socially because they were all quite a bit older.

SB: What were some challenges, some difficult things about working in the mill at that time?

SC: Umm, it was physically hard work but I was in shape. I couldn't do it today. Thank God. It was physical hard work. It was challenging. Some days you strapped the leather apron and you look at the clock and you're going to get a break in two hours you are full sweat physical...by the end of that day you earned your money right. And it was a dusty environment, dirty environment with saw dust and stuff. Back then you don't even think about that, you think about your health now...nobody wore the masks or anything right. Who knows if a bunch of these guys in a year or two or in ten years gets some type of lung...not disease but breathing is going to be a bit harder. Because I know my...it happened to my...you know Darshan? Anju's husband? His father had breathing issues and had to go through WCB and labor...and finally they fought it, fought it and they said it was a part of the mill and he got a disability pension. For the first 6-7 years they said nope. So some of those issues that you don't think about. Like nobody wore masks or anything. But it was... The only thing that today...there's way more vision. Back then you didn't have all the opportunities we got today like my son is thinking about all these things he wants to. Back then I was really going to school hoping something would come up. I didn't even have a direction of what I wanted to do but now I think the challenge was I don't want to do this mill work because it's hard.

KS: So you were really clear that you are not going to do this mill work for all your life. You wanted to go to university but you didn't know what to do...what you're going to do.

SC: Yeah. Yeah.

SB: What were some advantages of working in the mill? From the flip side from the difficulties.

SC: The money. The money was the biggest advantage. Yeah you got paid 3 to 4 more times...4 times more than what you'd make at McDonald's.

KS: That used to be your pocket money or you were supporting the family?

SC: Oh I'd just give it to my dad. My cheque. And then whatever I needed for school or basketball or whatever he would just give me money. That's sort of how the Indian families did it right.

SB: Do you remember what year you started working and what year you left approximately?

SC: Yeah I started in sawmills when I was 16 so that was 1982 and basically until about 1986. For about a 4 year period.

KS: Then you went to university?

SC: Yeah. It was really weird. The weirdest thing I found when I got my first cheque after not working in sawmill like doing this type of work. Like I was working at a..as a sales rep for an aluminum company and you know on a computer talking on the phone and I'd get a cheque for you know \$1000. I almost felt guilty because I didn't physically earn it right. I'm used to it now. You get your first pay cheque for talking and being smart.

KS: So when you got your first pay cheque in the mill how did you feel then?

SC: Oh I was surprised how big it was.

SB: Like you felt like you really earned it?

SC: Yeah whereas.

KS: ...some accomplishment?

SC: Yeah and when I got it after university I felt guilty.

KS: That you didn't physically earn it?

SC: Yeah, yeah.

KS: That's interesting.

SC: Like you're paying me for just talking.

KS: What was the overall living in that era uh in Canada? Uh overall intercultural relations? Overall economy? What was the life...like tell us a little bit more.

SC: Yeah everything was good it was the one thing that was difficult for me and my brother and my younger sister...not so much for my older sister, she was kept more traditional was trying to live a life where your parents are trying to keep you traditional and yet you're in a white school.

KS: Mostly white kids?

SC: Oh 100%. I think there might have been...in the elementary school there might have been—other than my cousins—my Taya Ji's kids...there were maybe 4 or 5 other kids out of you know a couple hundred. If you go to school in Surrey now there maybe there could be three quarters of it right and so you know the one thing you were told...you weren't even told it just you shouldn't be talking to girls and playing with girls and duh, duh, duh and yet they're all around you and so trying to keep your Indian values but you're brought up in a white world. That was very difficult. You want to know go out and socialize with your friends yet their friends some of the white girls are there and you feel very uncomfortable because you know your parents won't approve of that. So once that sort of barrier got broken and that really didn't get broken until 19--...well one of my Taya Ji's kids married a white girl in 19—it would have been 19 about '82 yeah and uh the mom like cried for two weeks. Just in a room with her friends, aunts and stuff. They just cried and cried like the world has come to an end. Right and then once you know so

he was sort of exiled from the family and they finally get over it, it takes months or years or whatever and so and then once that barrier slowly gets broken. I mean it's so common now but as much as you know that part was difficult you know I could never have a party at home and actually tell my parents. So yeah just going over to Steve's. Yeah.

SB: Did they get more lenient with that like say with your older siblings...when the youngest one came up were they more lenient on him?

SC: A little bit more. A little bit more I mean obviously they got lenient when I married my wife who is Anglican... she is white and initially the perception was you know the white people are sort of white trash trailer park and then when they got to know her my grandma of age 100 would always tell the ladies at the park well you should see Sukh's wife she's so much better than my others because she comes over and makes roti. My wife embraced the culture, she's learned how to make all the Indian food and she you know wears the suits and stuff and all that time so that part has gone well so that opened up my parents' eyes too. It's changed a lot. They've had that for almost 20 years right so.

SB: That's interesting.

SC: Yeah the biggest change is just being in two different cultures and both cultures hadn't joined yet.

KS: And how about economy?

SC: The economy was ok. Yeah I mean everybody had enough money I mean we ate well you know there was never an issue...because back then everybody like now everybody needs the 80 inch TV and the coolest car. Back then everybody was happy with the basics. And if someone actually bought something really nice it was almost like you were trying to show off. Everybody you knew had a basic car, a four door...oh look he got like power windows on his car that was like Wow! But it's just everybody is over the top right. Right back then you could have a wedding and have it at the community hall and people set up a bunch of chairs you know and we went to many of those giddas right when you do the night before and when people actually starting renting the community halls it first used to be at the house, then we actually ventured off to renting the community hall and now you look at today it's just crazy.

KS: So at your sister's wedding you said the ladies sungeet used to...was at house.

SC: Oh yeah everything was at the house.

KS: Everything was at the house?

SC: Except for the final reception. It was in Merritt at the community hall. Yeah and then my nephew, 29 years later, gets married at the Crown Palace and there's a thousand people there and I think they said they spent about \$100,000 on that wedding and I said their wedding cost \$3000.

KS: So in '80s it costed \$3000 and now \$100,000. Change in economy.

SC: Yeah. Well you guys have been to those type of weddings and you look at the kind of money that is spent and you just go wow you know.

KS: So you considered yourself a good citizen at that time or by the community or how you were perceived as in the community? You and your family.

SC: We were yeah my mum and dad didn't venture out too much they just stayed in the apna group but we had lots of friends and then you know we were good. We didn't do anything bad we weren't in the drug trade or bad people you know we played sports and we had good friends so you know I did some volunteer work and stuff. It was good. Yeah we were good kids.

KS: We're almost done if you want to add something as a last saying...

SC: Umm I'm trying to think. The difference--biggest difference for me today as to say how I was when I was younger I try to give my boys everything that I didn't have like when summer comes...now I enjoy the holidays probably even more because we didn't have summer holidays so in the last 10 years we've gone camping every summer, we go away for two weeks, we do all that and you know I sit there and I think it's because it had to start though somewhere we couldn't do it back then because that wasn't in our culture.

KS: You said it was something cultural not so much economical thing. It was a more cultural thing that our Punjabi people didn't use to go for vacation not because of money.

SC: That's right.

KS: Now your generation has developed that culture.

SC: Yeah and now even my parents have. My mum and dad they live the good life now. They go to India, they go to England. My dad does not like going to India anymore. He says I go to India- my mom's got family there my dad doesn't anymore. He said I go there Sukh it's the same old stories the people come and they just want you to feed them and give them some money for booze he said here I've got my card club, my pool people, then I go to my buddy's place and then he's got his social group and they talk about regular things on TV and stuff and he says I only do it for your mom now. And I say well you should!

It's funny how things change like that though.

SC: Yeah your dad's probably similar?

SB: Actually yeah he stopped going back to India as well.

SC: See? Yeah because they've adapted to this new way going this is nice. Right but before it would be like go back to India and you get a part of your whole culture back and because everything here still wasn't quite to where it is today. You know yeah all my buddies were in the village and we did this well you can get everything in India here times 10 in terms of cleanliness,

paved roads. I remember going to India and showing them pictures- I only went once in '96- and all the people around me were going, looking at these pictures and the cars and the driveway and say where are all the bicycles? Because in India everybody has a pedal bike and we're like we don't ride bikes everyone here has a car. Really? You know it's hard to fathom. Nowadays yeah my dad is like...they're gone, they're leaving next Sunday for three weeks and then they'll come back.

KS: Thank you so much for all the information.

SC: Yeah you're welcome. You'll find similar stories. You said you dad doesn't want to go to India because you know what? Now they've worked hard they've got everything I mean you could phone India just pick up the phone like they're next door right it's all way better. I'm so happy for my mom and dad because their retirement is the way it should be. They go out together in the morning to the pool, they hang out with their friends, then they do a little grocery shopping, then he goes to his card club, she does stuff around the house, and at the end of the day...the sad thing though is that they end up going to funerals most of the time because the community is so large. I bet you, they do a funeral a month. Yeah, yeah so but then they go to Akhand Paaths and weddings and stuff so. Then they're very generous because they've seen the other side. You know very generous with their grandkids so it's gone full circle. I'm happy for them we had them over for dinner on Friday night and we just built the new house, my wife and I for the two boys and they had been over a few times but they said we need an official invite. I said why you need an official invite? Because then we will give you your housewarming gift. So yeah my Friday night my wife made some Indian food and they came over. My younger sister goes what did they give you? They didn't give me nothing. And I said but they take care of your kids 5 days a week, the daycare and stuff so anyway it was fun.