

Sukhwinder Singh Bolla Transcription

Interview Date: November 9th, 2014

Meena: What is your name?

SB: Sukhwinder Singh Bolla

Meena: In what year were you born and where?

SB: 1980– 1964. May 4, 1964 Punjab, Chakdana, India.

Meena: When did you immigrate to Canada?

SB: 1984, 2nd January.

Meena: On January 2nd, 1984 you immigrated?

SB: Yes.

Meena: What is your status of immigration right now? Citizen, student, or immigrant?

SB: Citizen.

Meena: Citizen? ... When you first came here, what was your immigration status? Family class? Economic? Married by spouse? Point system?

SB: Family.

Meena: Family class?

SB: Yes.

Meena: Now I will ask you questions about your immigration story... Before coming to Canada, what village did you live in?

SB: Chakdana. The district before used to be Jalandhar but now it is Nawan Shehar.

Meena: And before coming here did you do any work? And if so, what work?

SB: India, agricultural. Farming.

Meena: For how long?

SB: Um... well after my... 5 years. 6 years.

Meena: 5-6 years immigration?

SB: Yes.

Meena: Or irrigation. Agriculture!

SB: Agriculture. Agriculture.

Meena: Um... did you ever own or work in a mill?

SB: Yes.

Meena: What mills did you work at and at what date and for how long?

SB: The first mill was Mission Shake and Shingle. It used to be in Mission.

Meena: What was the name?

SB: Mission Shake and Shingle

Meena: Shake and Shingle?

SB: Mission Shake and Shingle. That's the name of...

Meena: Okay.

SB: ... the place.

Meena: Okay, and for how long did you work at Mission Shake and Shingle?

SB: I did... almost.... 15 months.

Meena: 15 months?

SB: Yeah.

Meena: Okay. Were there any other mills that you worked at?

SB: Yes. There were more mills.

Meena: What mills were they?

SB: Fraser Cedar.

Meena: Fraser Cedar?

SB: Yeah. Fraser Cedar Shake and Shingle.

Meena: Okay. Uh, what type of mill did you work at? Was it a saw mill? Shingle mill?

SB: Shingle mill.

Meena. Shingle mill? And how did you find work at this mill?

SB: Here I... When I came from India... when I came from India I used to go to a farm.

After the farm I learned how to pack the shakes. I used to go as a helper with somebody. I learned from somebody. Then from there, I slowly got a job there.

Meena: In India? No, in Canada.

SB: In Canada. At Mission Shake and Shingle.

Meena: Ohh.., okay. Did somebody find this job for you or did you apply for it yourself? How did you get this job for the very first time?

SB: The mill that I used to go to learn, as a helper, to learn, that very mill began to understand that this man has already learned and they gave me the job. At Mission Shake and Shingle.

Meena: Okay. Did you try to find work anywhere else or was this your first job?

SB: This was my first ever job at a mill.

Meena: In Canada.

SB: In Canada. In a mill. This was my first job there. First was farming... I worked in a farm from that area. Then I... then it was this.

Meena: From working in the mill, what are your earliest memories?

SB: Memories... we were working there. Then I ... first I was packing there. Shake and Shingle. I was packing shakes. After that, then I wanted to learn to move forward and go up... to do the work of cubes. There was a separate job of cube work. It was hard. It had more money....

Meena: Mhmmm.....

SB: Then I learned cubes there and they gave me a chance, slowly-slowly, as people were leaving, I begun working with the cubes. Shake- after packing I begun doing cubes. First I was a packer, then I became a Cuber man. Cuber man.

Meena: Okay. As in promotion?

SB: Yes.

Meena: What as your first job there? And did you change your jobs? I think you just answered that question.

SB: Yes, I said I was first a packer... shingle shake... shake packer and shingle packer.

Meena: Yeah.

SB: After that, I was a Cuber man. Those who cut up and throw down. That had more money and less headache. Then from that, they gave me another job. Cuber man. I was a Cuber man.

Meena: From working in the mill, tell me about your experiences. How was the work and the environment there?

SB: From the time that we were working there, in '85, that was better than the farm. Whoever was working at the mill, they used to say "he works at a mill." That was his name.

Meena: Hmm...

SB: That yes, a great man he is, working at a mill, he's better. Because at a farm, when I first came from India, at that time I used to get 3 dollars and 35 cents hourly. At that time, the hourly wages weren't given to anyone. My whole... on January 2nd, 1984 I came and on January 9 I had went to pick sprouts and in the whole day 7 dollars or 8 dollars were given after 16 hours of picking sprouts. One day, I had made 16 dollars; that was my biggest day. 16 dollars a day. And, after that, I used to go at night to learn. I did graveyard. It started at 1am at night and went till 7 o'clock in the morning. They never even used to let anybody go to learn in the mills.

Meena: Mhmmm.....

SB: In that time, I went to learn. During the day I'd work at the farm and at night, a man used to pick me up, a friend of mine, who I still appreciate and remember to this day. I didn't have a license or a car. I had nothing. He used to pick me up and he taught me.

Meena: Mhmmm.....

SB: There I worked and afterwards I got a job to pack.

Meena: Okay. Who else worked at the mills? Different races... were they all 'apney?' Do you remember some of those people's names?

SB: No, there were lots of 'gorey.' Yes, to this day I remember there was Dave and Mike the foreman. I worked in other mills too so there was difference... This was an 'apna' mill and I also worked at 'gora- owned' which was Green River. The 'gora-owned' was Scott Cedar and Blue River and after that I worked 6 years. After the 90's I got into trucking, in 1991.

Meena: Okay. What was the name of the 'gorey' mills?

SB: The 'gora' mill was Blue River Shake and Shingle in Abbotsford. There I did cubes. After that I had become a Cuber man.

Meena: For six years, did you say?

SB: Six years, no! All together I did six years in the mills.

Meena: Oh, okay. Um... by working in the mill as a worker, as a labour worker, what kind of challenges did you face? Difficult times.

SB: In that time, it was okay. It was hard. But, in all aspects, it was okay. We were packing and I was a Cuber man. And... in that time it was okay according to wages. It had more money to it.

Meena: Okay. So, no difficulties in those times?

SB: Difficulties... well now too there are difficulties. It was hard work. It was hard work. We did cube work, which sometimes had day off – there was lots of discrimination.

Meena: Hmm.

SB: Of the goras. The gorey, whites, and we had a huge difference between us.

Whatever was a good job, they used to get. We, as Cuber mans they never used to let us get up. They'd say "we're not going to let the Hindu's get up" because that was a better job. There, there were gorey. If there were no gorey only did they give us a chance to go up. Because of that, I slowly and slowly did get a chance. In the whole industry there

were only us 7-8 Cuber mans from that time. There was not every 'apna' Cuber man back then. If you suppose there are 12 machines working with Cuber mans who cut cubes, out of those 12, there would be 12 gorey. Nobody else would be up there.

Meena: Hmm.

SB: Only if they ever needed us did they give us part time 1-2 hours or 3 hours of work. If somebody was sick or came late only. With lots of difficulty and hard times did we slowly-slowly get 4 hours when we got the chance, and only if we got a chance? Otherwise, they just didn't want us up there to do the cubes up there. It was a good job, they just wanted us to stay beneath them.

Meena: Hmm... it was discrimination.

SB: Yes, discrimination.

Meena: What were the advantages of working in a mill?

SB: There were some unions. Unions had set rates. When we went, we knew we'd be guaranteed to get our 8 hours of wages. Back then, we used to get \$147 – minimum wages. We were piece workers. Back then, we used to get \$2.65 for squares. We were to cut 5 bundles or tie them down. For that, we used to get \$2.65 per square. For the minimum, even if you didn't get 35 or 40 squares, you were guaranteed that 147 dollars, which was lots back then.

Meena: Mhmmm.....

SB: Otherwise, in other mills that didn't have unions there was only piece work. Whether it was only 20 squares of the day or 25 squares of the day, you were going to get it based on the 2 dollars. That is why everyone was running toward the union sides.

Meena: Ohh okay.

SB: Because there they had a guarantee that for the 8 hours, you'd get \$147 minimum wages guaranteed.

Meena: Oh, okay.

SB: Otherwise, the other mills who were non-union, they'd only give 2 dollars or \$2.50, whatever they'd give. The wood wasn't good. Whether it was 20 squares or 50 squares – doesn't matter. It would only go by square. Sometimes after a whole day we wouldn't even make \$50. Because of that, people were running towards the unions.

Meena: Oh, okay. So the advantage of working in a mill was the guarantee that you'd get a set amount on your pay cheque.

SB: Yes! Yes!

Meena: Okay. What was the date that you had left your job at the mill? Do you remember?

SB (and wife): Umm... do you remember? 1990- 1991. It was May-June. Yes, '91 in July August. I don't remember the month. In that time I had quit the gora's mill Green River Shake and Cedar in Mission. It was really popular, a very big mill. Scott Cedar Green River is a very big mill. There I used to cube. I was a Cuber man.

Meena: Mhmmm..... So 1991?

SB: 1991.

Meena: May?

SB: August... or July or August. Whatever.

Meena: Spring-summer time.

SB: Yeah, yeah, yeah!

Meena: When you were working in the mill in Canada, in your opinion, what were the conditions like in Canada?

SB: In that time it was okay. Everything was cheap. Grocery was cheap. Living was cheap. Everything was cheap. According to that were our wages. And... however much we were making, if you suppose, whoever was working in the mill, they used to say it was good. Or in a farm or a nursery or a cannery. Canneries were also good. In farming... well that's all there was. By making weeks, just sit at home. Get unemployment.

Meena: In order to become a citizen, how did your job help you?

SB: In order to become a citizen, my job didn't help me – time helped me. However much time was required, after 3 years or so you can do your application. After 3 and a half years had passed we did our application to become citizens. After that we got a call and had our appointment and did our test – we passed our test and got issued as a citizen.

Meena: Okay. Do you have any photos or artifacts that you can give me of that time?

SB: Of that time, it could be that we have old photos of that time, and those we could give. Otherwise, there's no guarantee. We do have old photos; you can get them all.

Meena: Okay, that's all there was to our interview. Thank you.