

Surinder Singh Sandhu Transcription
Interview date: February 8th, 2015

KS: What is your name?

SS: Surinder Singh Sandhu.

KS: and when were you born?

SS: March 1942.

KS: Where?

SS: Back home in India.

KS: What area?

SS: My village is Rurka, in Punjab.

KS: What is your date of birth?

SS: March 15, 1942.

KS: How old were you when you came to Canada?

SS: When I came to Canada I was 25 years old. 4 years prior to that I had gone to England.

KS: So for what reason did you go from England to Canada?

SS: To just travel and roam. And then when I was 25 the immigration people had me do a visitor's application. They said I couldn't stay here so then I got married.

KS: In 1952?

SS: No, in 1967.

KS: You came to Canada. Do you remember the date?

SS: June 21st.

KS: And after how long did you get married upon coming here?

SS: 6 months. Back then you could get a 6 month visa.

KS: A visitor visa?

SS: Yes.

KS: And did someone find a girl for you beforehand?

SS: No, they found her here.

KS: Who found her for you? Was someone of yours living here in Canada?

SS: Yes, my mother's side.

KS: Your maternal side was here when you came. Did they know prior that they'd need to find a girl?

SS: No. Just found her.

KS: So when you lived 6 months, did you make up your mind that you wanted to live in Canada? Did you like it?

SS: Yes, yes. I liked it better than England.

KS: What things did you find especially nice?

SS: The environment here and there wasn't anything bad when roaming here. In England at the time there was a lot of air pollution from the factories.

KS: Was it better than India? What things did you like here as opposed to India?

SS: Everything here.

KS: Like what?

SS: There I didn't have much money. Here I was able to make money and was able to get whatever I wanted.

KS: You didn't do any work in India in those 25 years?

SS: I was 21 years old when I left India. I was in England for 4 years.

KS: What village did you say you were from again?

SS: Rurka.

KS: And you studied till the age of 21?

SS: I studied till the age of 18.

KS: From what class?

SS: Grade 10.

KS: After that?

SS: After that I didn't do anything. I was refusing to do anything!

KS: Did you help your dad in the agriculture and do any farming?

SS: No, I didn't have my dad then. I was 6 months old when.

KS: It's okay. And you weren't working there, you were earning money when you came here.

SS: No, when I went to England.

KS: What did you do in England?

SS: I was working in a factory. Sterling Matters was the factory's name.

KS: That was a visitor's visa or work?

SS: It was permanent resident.

KS: And when you came here were you a resident of England?

SS: Yes, I was a resident of England.

KS: And after how long did you find work here?

SS: Right away.

KS: Right away?

SS: Right away! The next day!

KS: But for 6 months you were not an immigrant so how'd you work?

SS: Back then nobody wasn't asking much.

KS: You didn't apply for a work permit?

SS: No, I didn't do anything.

KS: And so did you get your salary SIN card?

SS: Yes.

KS: Were visitors applicable to get it back then?

SS: Yes, they were able to.

KS: So where did you first work?

SS: Plumper bay Sawmill.

KS: Where was that?

SS: Victoria.

KS: Where was the first place you came to in Canada? Victoria?

SS: I got off at Toronto then the flight went to Vancouver.

KS: Did you have anyone living in Victoria? Your maternal side?

SS: Yes.

KS: And the next day you got a job. What kind of work did you do?

SS: Sawmill.

KS: No, what was the work?

SS: The work was being a green chain puller.

KS: How did you like the work?

SS: It was very hard. Very hard. But my work over there was very hard too.

KS: In England. You had gotten used to it.

SS: Yes.

KS: And how long did you work in this mill?

SS: From 1967 for 18 years.

KS: You only worked in one mill?

SS: 18 years in 1 mill. For 6 months I did BCFP. British Columbia Forest Products.

KS: You did that for 6 months. In the beginning or middle?

SS: In the middle.

KS: Why did you leave in the middle?

SS: My previous person found this work for me. The mill had stalled. He said I have to come whenever I start back.

KS: So the mill had stalled and so that's why you went to work at BCFP. But when it started you came back. Your employer was happy. And was the mill of a gorey or apney?

SS: Apney. My Nana Ji's. It was my Nana's brother.

KS: What was his name?

SS: Piyari Deol.

KS: Was that a union mill?

SS: Yes.

KS: And that's why you found work the next day.

SS: Yes.

KS: Had you worked on the green chain from the beginning?

SS: I worked on the green chain.

KS: How many days?

SS: 3 years. Then I did inside developing. Inside the mill.

KS: Then what did you do?

SS: Tail saw.

KS: Did someone teach you that?

SS: It wasn't a very secure job. There was a lot of sawdust.

KS: Did it effect you in any way?

SS: No.

KS: How long did you work there?

SS: I did around 15 years there.

KS: Then?

SS: Then that mill stalled. Then I was free for about 2-3 years. There was factory that was called Sherwood Industries. On Teaton Crossroads.

KS: What kind of factory was that?

SS: Of wood stoves. They made that.

KS: That was a factory. Not sawmill or lumber mill. What kind of work did you do there?

SS: I did grinding there. I had experience in England. I told them that I had experience and they invited me over.

KS: How long did you work there?

SS: Around 10 years.

KS: Then what?

SS: Then I retired.

KS: At what age?

SS: 65.

KS: Was Sherwood Industries a union?

SS: No, not union.

KS: But the rest of your time you worked in unions.

SS: Yes.

KS: Did you find any difference in working in a union vs. a non-union?

SS: I didn't see any difference. I can keep the employer happy and give 110%. I have no botheration. Because I was doing my own work.

KS: When you first came here at your first job what was your salary/wages? In your first mill.

SS: It was \$2.81. – 81.5 cents.

KS: What year was this?

SS: 1967

KS: Was that the minimum wage then?

SS: That was the green chain rate. The minimum wage was 5 cents lower than that.

KS: Did you get paid better because this was your nana's mill?

SS: No.

KS: Everyone would get that much.

SS: Yeah.

KS: Did your wages increase as you did other jobs?

SS: The wages were just 10-15 cents higher. But I was happy there because I would get overtime.

KS: Was working on the saw just as difficult as working on the green chain?

SS: It was the same kind of effort.

KS: And were there more Punjabi men or gorey?

SS: In our sawmill we were all Punjabi. 1 gora was doing the saw and 4-5 Red Indians were also working because the mill was on a Red Indian's reserve.

KS: Canadian/Red Indian as in First Nations?

SS: Yes.

KS: It was their reserve and they were working too.

SS: They had a right that a certain percentage would be allowed to work in the mill.]

KS: So they had reservations.

SS: The Company had to keep them.

KS: Were there gorey too?

SS: The gorey were mostly all mill wrights.

KS: Why were all the gorey Mill Wrighters but all the apney were on the green chain?

SS: I don't know that. For 7-8 years I even worked on the barge.

KS: What does barge mean?

SS: Those big chips of wood... the extra pieces of wood you see go into the chipper machine and become chips. We'd work on that barge that was in Bellingham.

KS: Okay. And were apney, gorey, and First Nations people all working well amongst one another?

SS: It was good.

KS: There was no difference and no discrimination. Were your supervisors gorey or apney?

SS: I think they were apney.

KS: And was there any difference in assigning jobs?

SS: No, no.

KS: What would you take to eat at the mill?

SS: I'd take roti.

KS: Was nobody saying anything about your food?

SS: Here they weren't but when I was at BCFP the gorey would walk by and raise their nose whenever they saw us eating.

KS: Because of the smell from your food. What else would you eat? Roti, Sabji, meat?

SS: I am not too happy with eating meat.

KS: Oh, you're a vegetarian.

SS: No, I'm not a vegetarian, I eat everything but

KS: No, so you took roti and sabji and daal.

SS: Daal and sabji.

KS: Did any of the goras ever taste your food?

SS: No, but in England the gorey would always ask for some and say, "Give me a piece! Give me a piece!"

KS: When did you get your Canadian citizenship then?

SS: When I got married. I ... then you'd get it after 3 years. I got it later because my time before my immigration status was not counted, only half of it was.

KS: So your 6 months weren't counted, just 3. Did you get it after 5 years or 3?

SS: 3.

KS: How would you get your citizenship back then?

SS: You'd just have to go there and tell them.

KS: Where was the immigration office?

SS: In Victoria.

KS: So you'd verbally tell them?

SS: You'd fill out an application.

KS: And would the citizenship come in the mail?

SS: Yeah. That's how my wife did hers.

KS: She wasn't born here?

SS: India.

KS: What village?

SS: Beer pind. Near Nakodar.

KS: Do you have any memories or stories of working in the mill. Tell me.

SS: I don't remember anything.

KS: How was your social life from when you were in the mill? What would you do after?

SS: I didn't have a television or a radio. I would go to the library on weekends and get books. I'd get off work and spend an hour or two reading books. I always read.

KS: And how was your social life? How was the crime rate? Was it peaceful?

SS: Peaceful.

KS: So nothing like any troubles happening in the city.

SS: No. Even here compared to Vancouver is quite less.

KS: How was your cultural life like celebrating events like Vaisakhi and Diwali?

SS: Yes, we'd celebrate Diwali.

KS: Where?

SS: At home.

KS: Not outside?

SS: No.

KS: Could you ever hear from outside that somebody was celebrating Diwali or Vaisakhi.

SS: No, it wasn't like that then.

KS: Was there a Gurdwara?

SS: Yes, there was.

KS: You wouldn't celebrate at the Gurdwara?

SS: We'd celebrate Vaisakhi and Christmas at the Gurdwara, as well as the New Year.

KS: Would people stay together?

SS: Yes, back then we'd all stay together with close relations. But now, when anyone sees each other, they turn their heads the other way **laughs**

KS: There were reasons to see each other like Vaisakhi and Diwali. What else?

SS: Lohri and New Year.

KS: How were weddings?

SS: Weddings happened at the Gurdwaras then.

KS: Who would you invite?

SS: Relatives.

KS: How about eating sweets?

SS: Nobody was making sweets.

KS: What would you eat at weddings then?

SS: Daal and roti. But when I got married there was chawal and daal.

KS: And anything else?

SS: Alu matar sabji and maha di daal.

KS: Were any sweets being made?

SS: No, just ladoos.

KS: How did people like you when you were working in the mill? Was it considered good work? Respectable?

SS: Yes, yes. Back then the wages in the mill were higher than anyone else working.

KS: It was considered superior then. Okay, that's good Uncle. Thank you.