

**Saw Mill Worker Stories**  
**Tarlochan Singh Basra Narration**  
**Interview Date: February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

Tarlochan Singh Basra was born in the Village Radhowal located in District Hoshiarpur in Punjab, India on October 6, 1946. Tarlochan Singh spent much of life with his father who was a member of the Indian Air Force. He had received his education up to grade twelve and was very well versed in reading, writing and speaking English.

Tarlochan Singh was 21 years old when he first arrived to Canada on May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1968. During the time, Tarlochan Singh's massi (mother's sister) was living in Lake Cowichan and she had arranged Tarlochan's marriage. Thus, Tarlochan was sponsored by his fiancé, and soon after they were married in Victoria. When he arrived in Victoria, Tarlochan Singh soon after, began working in Sardar Mohan Singh's mill. Tarlochan Singh would only work at this mill for four months, during which his major position was to work the green chain which was very difficult and demanding work. Soon after, he began working in the BC Forest Mill which was one of the largest mills in Victoria at the time. Tarlochan Singh would work at this mill for many years during which through his seniority he would attain the position of a forklift operator. During the promotions process Tarlochan Singh did not receive any formal training although he was taught by drivers before him just as he taught other drivers, etc.

In 1989, Tarlochan Singh then moved to Campbell River where he began working at a mill in the forklift driver position. In this mill Tarlochan Singh also worked as a lime burner and kiln operator where he would place the pulp in paper where it would be mixed with a pump. Tarlochan Singh would continue to work at this mill until his retirement in 2004 at the age of 55. Tarlochan Singh took an early retirement as he had promised his children when they all moved to Campbell River that he would do so. Tarlochan Singh and his wife have two daughters and one son.

According to Tarlochan Singh, the ratio between Punjabi and non-Punjabi workers was approximately 50/50 at the BC Forest Products mill in Victoria. There were very few Punjabi men to begin with; however, when another mill called the Point Ellis Mill closed in 1971, many of the Punjabi men working there were transferred to the BC Forest Products Mill. In Campbell River however, Tarlochan Singh notes that here were only four Punjabi men working while the rest were of European origin. When he first began working in Victoria at the mill, Tarlochan Singh's starting wage was the standard minimum wage of \$1.75; however, by the time he retired in 2004 Tarlochan was earning \$42.00 an hour as a forklift operator.

Tarlochan Singh recalls that he faced small instances of discrimination while working in the mills. For example, he had to be persistent in his demand for a promotion because other people of European origin workers did not want him receiving promotions. According to Tarlochan Singh he earned his promotions through his seniority and so he threatened to go to the Union

with the matter. Luckily however, he did receive his promotion. Overall however, because Tarlochan Singh was so well versed in speaking English, he faced little discrimination. In fact, he would spend more time working alongside the Caucasian workers than other Punjabi workers who would work and converse in their own groups. During lunch time even, because the European origin workers complained of the smell of the Indian food, Tarlochan Singh would eat western foods only.

Overall Tarlochan has fond memories of his time in the mill, mostly due in part to the fairly easy job of working as a forklift operator which was much easier than working on the chain, etc. In addition, the Union pension and benefits meant that Tarlochan Singh would never really be in search of other jobs in his life. He was always satisfied with the mill experience.