

Saw Mill Worker Stories

Tarlochan Singh Lally Narrative

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Tarlochan Singh Lally was born on 11th September, 1962 in Village Ucha, District Jalandhar in Punjab, India. He immigrated to Canada on June 11th, 1982 when he was 20 years old under the family class regulations. Tarlochan Singh's elder sister, who was already living in Canada, had sponsored him to immigrate to Canada. Today, he is now a Canadian Citizen.

Before immigrating to Canada, Mr. Lally lived in the same village where he was born and was studying in college all while at the same time helping his parents in farming. Although he was studying for his B.A. degree, he had to leave his studies with his incomplete B.A. at the time of immigration to Canada. Mr. Lally remembers that he had started helping his parents in farming when he was very young, about 13-14 years of age when he was physically able to do so.

When he first arrived to Canada, Mr. Lally didn't like it much because as a newcomer it takes time to feel at home, it is hard to find work and it was also a recession period in the early 1980's. He felt lonely especially when he wasn't able to find work. Things started getting better when he first began working as a general labourer, in a farm and nursery, and eventually began working in a mill in 1984. Because of the recession taking place at the time, Mr. Lally really worked hard to keep his job going as they had a fear of being laid off every day. Many mills were being shut down during the recession period and as such, many labourers were unemployed.

In addition to working at the Mission Shake and Shingle Mill, he also worked for three years on the railway from 1988 to 1990. He used to take the summer time off and work in the railways and would go back to work in the mill again during the winter months. He heard of the railway work through his friend who also happened to be working there. Though the work was hard, the salary was much better than what he received in the mills. In the end of 1990 he had to leave the Railway job as it required him to move out of town which was something he was not willing to do.

Mr. Lally's first mill related job after the odd and end work he did was at the Indian owned Mission Shake and Shingle Ltd, where he would work for ten years from 1984 to 1994. During the last three years in the company, he was promoted to the position of a supervisor. According to Mr. Lally, the shingles that were used for roofing were saw-cut by the machines which he then operated on in order to make shingles. Working on the shingle saw machines could be dangerous at time, but he did it. As such, many men didn't learn the job because it was dangerous to work on the machines. The men who were new on that job suffered many accidents; for example, someone would cut their hand or many

other types of accidents occurred. When he first began working, Mr. Lally didn't know much about mill work, he didn't know what a Shingle Sawyer job meant, etc. Mr. Lally worked as a supervisor from 1990 to 1993 and then he stepped down from supervisory role and worked again but in a different mill. While he was a supervisor, Mr. Lally received many opportunities to learn different jobs within the mill. The Supervisory role was different; for example, he would mainly arrange the work crew, get the work done by them, all the while being mindful of production and avoiding the wastage of wood etc. Overall, Mr. Lally was good in his supervisory role as he kept a balance between the employer and the employees.

In 1994, Mr. Lally moved on to a better job opportunity in order to work at the S & W Forest Products located in Maple Ridge. He worked there for 10 years from 1995 to 2005. He started off as a Shingle Sawyer at S&W and then after 5 years he became supervisor there as well. At S&W, he found the work hard when compared to the Mission Shake and Shingle, because of the great responsibility he dealt with, although the salary was more. The S & W Forestry was owned by a European origin person and Mr. Lally felt more freedom to work at his pace and independence.

For a short time period, Mr. Lally purchased a small farm in 1993 and then began working on the farm, alongside with working in the mill until 2005. From 2004 to 2011, Mr. Lally did full time farming and part-time mill work while eventually transitioning into full-fledged farming by 2011. Despite devoting his full time efforts to his farm, still between 2011 and 2013, Mr. Lally did part-time mill work on call, which he was called upon from time to time. Mr. Lally had clear concepts about his work life, as he had already decided in his young age when he was doing part time farming, that by the age of 65, he didn't want to work for anyone, but for himself. He was determined to be self-employed one day and support his family by his own.

From 2005 to 2011, the same time period he had bought his farm, he worked in another mill for eight years, which was the Walden Forest Products in Maple Ridge. Most workers (about 75%) were Indian and 25% were people of European origin. Even though for the most part of his life Mr. Lally worked at the Shake and Shingle mill, he found that he had more flexibility of working at the Walden Forest Products.

Mr. Lally was a very hard working person throughout his life. He recalls for example how during the recession from 1982 to 1984, they would not receive any work in the mills and so they worked in canneries or nurseries. In addition, Mr. Lally relays some memories of inter cultural conflicts. For example, he mentioned the differences Indians would create with one another depending on their place of origin in different parts of Punjab, in North India. Even within the Punjabi community, people from Doaba and Malwa behaved differently. He shares his own story when he and another worker were the only ones from the Doaba area of Punjab and how the other workers were from Malwa. Because of this difference in areas, the other men didn't treat Mr. Lally very well. Even one of the owners (out of three), didn't like him. Mr. Lally faced great hardships in the beginning when he

joined the mill. According to him, such differences are still seen in society, but they are not that relevant today. He felt sad to feel that European origin Canadians would discriminate against the Indian community, but Indians were discriminating against their own race, depending on the place of origin in Punjab. He mentioned that there were not many European origin people working at Mission Shake and Shingle.