

Saw Mill Worker Stories

Tarlochan Singh Rai Narrative

Interview Date: February 8th, 2015

Tarlochan Singh Rai was born on April 5, 1947 in the Village Moranwali, located in District Hoshiarpur in Punjab, India. Tarlochan Singh first came to Canada when he was 23 years old in the year 1970 on a visitor basis. While in India, Tarlochan Singh had done some local village farm work, and so this is what he had started doing when he first arrived in Canada also. By the year 1976, and with the help of a friend, Tarlochan Singh then began working in sawmill called the Sartre Sawmill located in Ladysmith. Tarlochan Singh's main job was to pick up lumber blocks on the green chain. Although the work was difficult, Tarlochan Singh found it to be bearable. The demographic range was fairly split according to Tarlochan Singh, with 60% of the workers being European origin and 40% being Punjabi. All the higher up and supervisory positions however, so for example the position of foreman, were delegated to European origin workers only. Because Tarlochan Singh had family members living in Duncan, he didn't have to live in the bunkhouses but rather lived with his relatives. Tarlochan Singh would only work about 28 days in this mill in Ladysmith as he was then laid off. Soon after, Tarlochan Singh worked for six months in Chemainus on McMillan Road where he was again laid off. Finally, Tarlochan Singh found permanent work at the Unionized Doman Sawmill in Duncan where he continued to work for the next thirty to thirty two years. Tarlochan Singh worked a standard eight hour shift in the mill and was satisfied with his work and made good friends amongst his coworkers. Though for the most part, Tarlochan Singh's health was not impacted by his work in sawmill, he was injured in a minor incident where he was impacted and hit by a piece of lumber block right above his right temple. As a result his sight was affected and he needed to get glasses. According to Tarlochan Singh, because millwork was heavy and intensive work, injuries did happen on occasion.

During this time, Tarlochan Singh also had a wife in India; however, she would come and join him a few years later in 1974. Tarlochan Singh reflects back upon his first arrival to Canada and his original plan of only staying for a short time and hopes of earning enough income to go back home to India and support his family there. But he realized soon upon arriving to Canada that the rewards were instant in terms of hard work and income. In India, he found it more difficult to earn a proper wage based on farm work. And so, he opted to bring his family to Canada and build his life here.