

Tarlochan Singh Rai Transcription
Interview Date: February 8th, 2015

SB: Hello Uncle Ji what is your name?

TR: Tarlochan Singh Rai.

SB: Yes sir. What is your date of birth?

TR: 5th April, 1947.

SB: 1947? Where? In India?

TR: In India.

SB: Where in India?

TR: Our pind is Moranwali

SB: In what district/province?

TR: In District Hoshiarpur.

SB: Hoshiarpur. Ok. I what year did you come to Canada?

TR: 1970.

SB: How did you come? Family class, point system, sponsorship?

TR: No I came to visit...

SBains: So then you stayed here?

TR: Yes.

SBains: You came on holidays at first?

TR: Yes.

SB: What is your immigration status now? Are you a citizen or...?

TR: Citizen.

SB: Uncle Ji, before coming to Canada, what work did you used to do? Did you work? Did you study?

TR: I studied a little bit. I did a little bit of farm work and then I came here.

SB: How old were you when you came here to Canada?

TR: I was 22-23.

SB: Ok. When you came here, when did you start working in the mill?

TR: Umm work started in '77. Uhh '76.

SB: Was this after some time, or did you start working as soon as you got here?

TR: First I worked in the farms here. After that I started working in the mills.

SB: How did you find that work? Did a friend help you find work or a family member? How did you end up in the mill?

TR: A friend [helped me find work].

SB: Do you remember the name of the first sawmill you worked at? Do you remember what kind of mill it was? Was it sawmill?

TR: The first mill was in Ladysmith.

SB: Where--- in Ladysmith?

TR: [nods yes]

SB: At what position did you start working at that sawmill?

TR: Picking up lumber blocks...on the green chain.

SB: What is your first memory of working in that mill? Did it seem strange or...? How did you find the work in the mill?

TR: The work seemed good.

SB: Did you find the work hard?

TR: It was heavy work, yes.

SB: In that mill in Ladysmith, how many apney men were there?

TR: Apney men? There were 60% gorey and 40% apney men.

SB: Were the foremen typically apney or gorey?

TR: There were gorey at Dumans'.

SB: Many men that came here to Canada lived in bunkhouses. Did you?

TR: [Shakes head no].

SB: No. Was your family here with you?

TR: No. I had relatives in Duncan, I lived with them.

SB: Were you married at the time, or did you come here and get married?

TR: I was already married.

SB: Did your family come with you or did they stay in India?

TR: They were in India. They came in '74.

SB: So they came after some time?

TR: They came after some time.

SB: That mill in Ladysmith, how long did you work there?

TR: I worked there for 28 days and then I got laid off there. Then I found work in Chemainus on McMillan Road. There I worked for 6 months.

SB: 6 months? On the green chain?

TR: Yes on the green chain.

SB: Then?

TR: Then I got laid off from there. Then in Duncan I worked at the Doman's mill. There I worked for 30-31 years.

SB: Did you work in union mill?

TR: Yes.

SB: All of the mills [you worked at] were union mills?

TR: Yes they were union mills.

SB: Did you look for other work or did you stay in the mill?

TR: Just worked in the mill.

SB: Ok. Umm can you tell me what life was like for men that worked in the mills at that time? Did they work 8 hour shifts?

TR: 8 hour shifts.

SB: Day-to-day how did it seem to you?

TR: It seemed good to me.

SB: It seemed good to you? How were our men in the mill? Amongst yourselves, were you all friends?

TR: They was a mix [men working in the mill]. Yes, we were friends.

SB: For food, did you eat our food at the time?

TR: Yes our food.

SB: Where would you get that food?

TR: From home.

SB: Lentils and vegetables... In those days, were you able to buy lentils and vegetables in Vic—Ladysmith?

TR: No, there were lentils and vegetables at home.

SB: Ok. What seemed difficult to you when you worked in the mill?

TR: Difficult? Well the work was heavy but nothing seemed overly difficult because we were young and strong.

SB: For how long did you work in the mill?

TR: All together about 32 years.

SB: 32 years wow. Did you have any health problems from working at the mill? Some men develop asthma.

TR: No, it didn't happen to me.

SB: It didn't happen? Umm did any accidents happen in sawmill?

TR: An accident happened to me one time. A lumber block hit me here [points to right temple]. That's when I had to get glasses. In about 1980.

SB: So your sight was affected?

TR: Yes.

SB: Did this sort of thing happen to men often...accidents in the mill?

TR: The work was heavy and at some point you would get injured.

SB: When you came to Canada at the age of 22-23, did it seem strange to you...what did Canada seem like to you?

TR: When I came to Canada, in my head there was the thought that I would work for a short time, make a bit of money, and return [to India].

SB: OK. So why did you end up staying?

TR: Then here when I was staying here I told the people I was working for that I was only here for a short time to make some money and then I will go home. They told me, people come here they don't leave. Then I stayed here. I brought my family here. I brought my parents. Then we were set here.

SB: Did life seem better here in comparison to India?

TR: Yes, it seemed better.

SB: It seemed better. What seemed better in comparison to India in those days?

TR: It seemed better in that, in India you would work in the farms all day and you would never see the money and here you would work and you'd get a cheque. It seemed very good.

SB: I'm sorry, I forgot. What year did you come here?

TR: 1970.

SB: Were there quite a few apney living here at that time? Were there [apney] families here at that time?

TR: There were only a few.

SB: You stayed around Ladysmith?

TR: No I lived in Victoria. Then I got work in '76 and moved to Duncan.

SB: In 1970s you used to eat Indian food at home. But you needed to buy Indian lentils. Did you buy these lentils from some shop?

TR: No, no

SB: Weren't there Indian shops [at that time]?

TR: Very few.

SB: If you needed something, how did you get it?

TR: There were some Indian shops.

SB: Were the shops in Duncan or did you have to go to Vancouver?

TR: No, they were in Duncan.

SB: Do you remember the names of the stores at the time?

TR: No those shops have closed now. I don't remember their names.

SB: Were they grocery shops? What kinds of things could you buy there? Lentils, and what else?

TR: They sold groceries. Lentils, dry lentils, otherwise you could buy vegetables from gorey stores as well.

SB: Ok. Did you have to go far to go to the shops. There were only a few shops, right?

TR: No, didn't have to go too far.

SB: Ok. Other than that I don't have any more questions. Is there any memory or story you would like to share about those days.

TR: No, no story. I can't lie. The truth is, this is what it is.

SB: Ok thank you Uncle Ji.