

[Narrative of Gurdial Singh Talhan]

Saw Mill Worker Stories

Gurdial Singh Talhan Narrative

Interview Date: November 12th, 2014

Gurdial Singh Talhan was born on December 2nd, 1954 in the village of Talhan, Punjab, India. He immigrated to Canada on March 1977 under family class and now he has become a Canadian citizen. Before coming to Canada, he was a student, and after school hours he used to work in the farm.

Soon after Gurdial Singh arrived in Canada in 1977, he started working at a lumber mill as it was easy to find work in small towns. He says, "It was lumber mills that offered job and there were no other real choices. Whichever man came to BC at that time, went to find work at the Mill". His father also worked at a mill and when a new shift started at that mill, after two weeks of arriving in Canada, Gurdial Singh also found work at the same mill. He didn't need to look for any other work, because soon after 10 days in Canada, he was on the job and he knew he had to work and the work was available.

Gurdial Singh felt everything was very strange when he was now in Canada because it was totally different from life in India. He had never really worked in these kinds of jobs and the work in Canada was very different. But he didn't feel any cultural shock after coming from India, because he had family here and they buffered him from the effects of living in a very different country.

At the mill he first started as a sorter, but after 5 months he worked as a planer. There were different types of jobs in the mill, for example trimmer, stamper, grader, and the planer of lumber etc. but he worked to pile the lumber on the green chains, as a planer.

Gurdial Singh recalls earlier memories when he first started working in the mill. At first he thought all the people who worked in the mills were of Indian origin, especially when more than 80% of the workers were Indian men, even though the mill was owned by a man of European origin. This was especially true in small towns in the North, where with only a few exceptions - like up to 5% of the workers were Japanese and Chinese, mostly all the hard working jobs, for example, working on the chains, piling lumber were done by the Indians. A very few men of European origin did other jobs, such as working on the forklift, office work or foreman. Gurdial Singh feels that even now it is still the same in many mills, that mostly hard working Indian people are working and only 5% of the workers are from other populations. There is some change in the shake and stamper industries.

Gurdial Singh remembered that it was hard to work outside in the open both during cold and hot weather and in the wind, especially where there were no walls to the structures that he worked within. In Quebec, there was extreme weather up to -50 degree with a wind chill making

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