

This recording is an interview with former ILWU Local 502 longshoreman Jack Singh who worked along the New Westminster waterfront. The major themes discussed are longshoring, wages, East Indian immigrants, ILWU, work travelling, “hard work”, and Fraser Mills.

Interviewer: Dean Johnson

Date of Interview: 2013

Date Range: 1940s - 2013

Sound Recording Length: 55:52

At the time of the interview Jack Singh was 82 years old. Singh grew up in the Maillardville neighbourhood of Coquitlam. Everyday after school he would walk past the Fraser Rails personnel office, and on June 14th 1945, at age 14, was . Singh worked the “green chain” at Fraser Mills. Singh began working as a longshoreman in 1958, and his first longshore job was at Fraser Mills. The interviewer, who also worked at the waterfront, recalled Singh as being the first East Indian that he knew of at the International Longshoremen’s & Warehousemen’s Union (ILWU) Local 502 in New Westminster. Throughout the interview Singh describes the “hard work” he did as a longshoreman, and his experiences travelling to work at other jobsites in Canada and the US. Singh worked as a longshoreman until 1995, and retired as an operator on the coal dock at Westshore Terminals. Overall, Singh speaks positively about his experience longshoring, as it gave him many opportunities to travel and fun experiences.

Section 0:00-8:35

- In this portion of the interview Singh discusses how he started longshoring and describes a “shape up” system for choosing workers that existed prior to the later longshore hall dispatch system. He discusses how as a longshoreman, he worked in “gang number 8”, and his gang were well known for being the “first ones on and the last ones off”. He discusses the type of hard manual labour he did without the aid of machines and the different docks he worked at. Singh discuss his work travel card, which permitted him to work in ports such as San Pedro and Long Beach, California. Describes loading creosote ties, zinc, lead, pulp.

Section 8:36 – 19:57

- In this portion of the recording Singh describes his first job at Fraser Mills and the story of how he got the job by lying about his age. Singh worked night shifts because the Fraser Rails would pay the employees 72 cents an hour, which was 5 cents an hour more than the day workers. He worked for six years on the green chain before he started working as a longshoreman in 1958.¹ Singh states that he never experienced any problems being the first East Indian at ILWU 502. Singh discusses the changes that he has noticed in longshoring, such as the emergence of women (“girls”) working. Singh also tells a few stories of his experiences working as a longshoreman, in particular with his friend Herman Chrysler, who he worked on the west coast of the United States with.

¹ The dates do not match up with starting work at age 14 in 1945 and then working 6 years before switching to longshoring in 1958. It is possible he began longshoring earlier than 1958 given Singh’s description of a “shape up”, however, he may have had different work between the 2 job sites.

Section 19:58 -- 34:46

- In this portion of the interview Singh talks positively about longshoring. He describes a time when he and Herman Chrysler were sent to Roberts Bank to drive Caterpillars, but neither knew how to operate the machines. He describes high wages, the parties on the job, the friends he made, and how the work kept him healthy. In this particular section the interviewer and Singh discuss how the longshoremen they worked with have recently passed away and Singh's current condition, as at the time of the interview he has cancer of the esophagus and is living in a nursing home or hospice. Singh also goes into the story of how he got into longshoring.

Section 34:47 -- 55:52

- In this portion of the interview, the interviewer and Singh discuss the different materials they worked with and how they were handled, such as nickel matte and animal hides. Singh briefly discusses the type of machines he liked to work with. Overall, this section of the interview is of Singh telling funny stories from his experience as a longshoreman, and how he reminisces about the friends who he worked with.