

Third in a series of reminiscences by Venosta's Tom McLaughlin on his days in a 1930 logging camp:

Sapho! Have you ever heard of Sapho? After I have filled you in on our battle with Fred, our head logger, I will tell you about Sapho, and how to rid yourself of vermin.

The spit dampened Fred's ardor, and to our surprise and relief, his anger subsided as quickly as it had flared up. He turned and stomped into the bush, roaring what was going to happen to us, if we didn't get to work. Clifford's firey statement just wasn't working.

My brothers huddled, and came up with the decision not to back down. With that, I was ordered to dispose of the contaminated potatoes, and to boil a fresh pot, while the others trekked to the farm to confront our father. From what I was able to gather later, my father tried to pull rank, and ordered the trio back to the bush. My brothers weren't buying. Up to that time, my father had never tolerated back talk. Impudence, or anything else closely resembling that condition, was sure to bring you a sidewinder, or a bumpy rear-ender. Sometimes worse. I believe that he was all but defenseless against the determination of the rebels. They refused to return to the camp until he agreed to return with them, and fire Fred. While all this was going on, a crisis was developing in my area.

Fred had returned to the cabin, with new-found courage and fury, axe in hand, looking for us "whimps", as he always called us. He came in the



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door like a raging bull. I was mightly scared. It looked as if he might strike me with the axe handle. He ordered me to get to the bush, and what he wasn't going to do to those other whimps, when he caught up with them.

Then my antagonist spied the potatoes boiling on the stove. When I explained the situation, it looked as if his face was going to explode. It took on several distortions and shades. I prepared myself for the worst.

Have you ever known real terror? The kind that sends streaks of chilblains through your entire body? I had trouble getting my feet going. I decided that I had no time for paralysis. I opted for self preservation. I had the feeling that Fred was moving in for the kill. He swung at me with the axe handle. I deftly dodged the full swing, but he caught me on a rib. The blow took my breath away, and I was having trouble keeping out of his reach. With the help of the large table and the benches, I managed to keep ahead of him.

The one-sided battle continued around the table. I was in my sock feet, and my coat wasn't handy.

Besides these little inconveniences, it was a severe cold morning, so I wasn't fussy about heading for the door. So far, I had managed to keep out of the way of Fred's wild swings across the table with the axe handle.

When my pursuer found that he wasn't getting anywhere in this endeavor, he grabbed the pot of potatoes off the stove. I readied myself to dodge the scalding water. He opened the door and flung the pot, and all, out into the snow, narrowly missing my rescuers.

Fred's rage evaporated instantly, and I became an instant cripple. What, with my bruised ribs, and all, I put on a pretty good act, if I do say so. So much so, that Fred was history forthwith. Gone, bag and baggage. When Clifford heard my story, the others were hard-pressed to keep him off Fred. He was lucky to leave with his skin. Oh, old dad still tried to arbitrate, but his position was greatly diminished by this latest incident. With four grim-faced sons surrounding him, his bargaining power was gone the way of Fred.

Fred took his mate with him, and the camp became a family operation. Clifford immediately claimed the position of head logger. With his new stature, this was no problem with the rest of us. But, horror of horrors, father countered with the installation of Loretta, our older and bigger sister, as overall seer. This would surely mean a clean-up of the camp, and a bath every Saturday night. Head and all. On one such occasion, Leonard, next brother to me, woke up one night yelling that something had caught him. His hair was frozen to the cabin wall. Continued next week.