

FOURTH IN A SERIES OF REMINISCENCES BY VENOSTA'S TOM MCLAUGHLIN ON HIS DAYS IN A 1930'S LOGGING CAMP:

(After successfully fending off their abusive foreman, Tom and his brothers must endure the oppressions of their domineering sister, Loretta.)

Loretta descended on the camp like an avalanche, bringing her wash tub, clothes boiler, Sapho and creoline with her. If you have ever submerged your bottom in creoline-laced water, then I know that I have your sympathy. Loretta never did anything by halves. Her scrubbing removed the skin, and her heavy doses of creoline stung like hell.

Oh, there was talk of banishing Loretta from the camp also. But that's as far as it got. With their new-found powers, my brothers could probably have pulled it off. Whether it was my sister's overpowering personality, our hidden affection for her, (which I suspect) or our awe of women in general, the crunch never came. Loretta was allowed to proceed with torture.

For those who don't know what Sapho was, or is, I don't know if you can still get it, but you must try. It was a very effective louse killer. It came in a container not unlike a large powder puff. When it was pressed in the center, a fine powder shot out. When the dust landed among them, you could almost hear the vermin screaming and the clitter-clatter of little feet as they scampered for purer climes.

We other occupants of the camp didn't enjoy



Tom
McLaughlin

the scourging either, as our sister went over the cabin in an exterminating frenzy with her Sapho. We could taste it, smell it, and suffered the irritating dry feeling that the powder caused between our skin and clothing. This was an indignity that no logger should have to endure. A bath every night, another indignity foreign to a genuine logger's way of life, was law, until Loretta had rid the cabin of everything that walked on more than two feet.

The snow was gone from around the cabin within two weeks of my sister's invasion. We were now compelled to gather snow to melt in the big boiler that she kept on the back of the stove, for our baths and for boiling our clothes. This was like digging your own grave, as you whiled away your final hours. Not that we minded being clean, but this was just no life for a logger. Worse. There was always the danger of getting to like it.

Up until this time, the loggers seldom had the opportunity or the desire to take a full-sized bath during the winter months.

The cabin was drafty and no place for naked, wet bodies. Christmas time was an exception. Previ-

ously, my brothers had to endure the process of delousing and bathing in the drafty summer kitchen, before they were allowed into the farmhouse for their brief Christmas visit.

Most of Loretta's rules were an inconvenience, but some of them I liked. We went about our bathing as if we were the snow that was going to melt away in the rains. Loretta seemed bent on setting up the bathing area in the draftiest corner of the cabin, with no room for appeal. This didn't help matters much. Loretta provided a buffer between my brothers and the pig and I. The sow was fast becoming my pet and constant companion. And an annoyance to everyone else in the camp. My brothers were no longer allowed to kick her when she broke out of the barn and came to the cabin looking for me.

According to Loretta, who was already a strong pioneer woman, and who was the self-appointed guardian of our morals, sense of values and other deficiencies and who was a loyal fan of her own sense of humour when we males were the target, the pig was in the camp not only to eat the garbage, but to remind us other denizens of the compound that our fading image of humanity during the winter months was to be temporary, and that we would be required to return to some form of normalcy come spring.

I endured the unfavorable rules as the winter wore on. I missed my younger siblings most on Sundays, and my older brothers had returned to ignoring me again. Loretta was always busy. She hadn't yet cleaned us up enough so that we could spend a Sunday at the farmhouse.