

SEVENTH IN A SERIES OF REMINISCENCES BY VENOSTA'S TOM MCLAUGHLIN ON HIS DAYS IN A LOGGING CAMP BACK IN THE 1930S

*(In our last episode, young Tom begins to learn a few lessons in psychology when the gang at the logging camp begins to suffer from a touch of cabin fever)*

Something was creeping through the camp. I couldn't understand it, but I could feel it. I accepted this change in the emotional environment as a normal development, as I did most situations in those days. But I was uneasy at times.

The other inhabitants of the camp weren't talking or laughing in the evening, as they used to do. They were getting angrier more often. The days were becoming more silent, and Loretta's broom more active. All in all, the camp was becoming a more hazardous area for a troublemaker like myself. I didn't realize it at the time, but my co-workers were becoming stir-crazy right before my very eyes. My mischief wasn't helping any, but I was having a field day. I was having less trouble getting my butt kicked, and my head buried in the snow more often. When people are angry, it's a simple matter to make them angrier. I wouldn't have had it any other way.

Clifford was a "cool hand Luke" sort of guy. In my rare uneasy moments I could see that he was having trouble keeping the fractious camp from exploding. Everybody seemed to be trying to run things. There were struggles, and there were struggles within struggles. To say nothing of my struggles for recognition and acceptance.



Tom  
McLaughlin

I took all this change with a feeling of excitement. It would have been dangerous, in that environment, to call myself an entertainer. But I'm sure you will recognize the qualities. I had my animals, and my mischief to help me maintain my equilibrium. The others only had each other. Like fire and gasoline. And me.

Father's trips to the camp warned him, I think, that something untoward was happening. We rarely rated on each other, although father tried hard to get us to do so. His strategy was to divide and control. If we were fighting among ourselves, and didn't trust each other, so much the better. He was concerned, I think now, that we were growing up, and he was about to lose that control. Instead of backing off and trying to bring us on side, he increased the pressure, the criticism and the threats. His goal was to convince us that our island under his umbrella was surrounded by quicksand, and that we could never survive in the outside world.

Probably all we needed was a short holiday away from the camp, and out from under each other's feet, as it were. A weekend at the farm probably would have done the trick. Any talk of that nonsense, though would have brought more criticism

and threats, and probably a kick her and there. I always took his threats seriously, and they spread terror through me. Father's threats were the only thing that I did take seriously at that time.

Father's trips to the camp became more frequent, and he was getting meaner. When he left the area, it was as if a heavy, smothering blanket had been lifted, and the camp became a reasonably happy place again. I think that we were all in silent agreement that it was in our interest not to give him a reason to return to the camp. But the cloud of infighting soon took up its position over the camp again.

At times like these, Father didn't need a rat in the camp to tell him that all was not well. He seemed to sense what was going on, and when things were about reach the exploding point, back he would come again. On one such occasion, he threatened to send one of us to the farm to look after things there, and he would stay in the camp and run things himself. That did it. The camp settled down, and we were determined to get along if it killed us. Sure enough, when there was less controversy, Father's visits were much less frequent.

In spite of the harshness of the environment, emotionally and otherwise, I enjoyed being alive, immensely and I wouldn't have been happy with the alternative. I know a lot of dead people, and I don't see any reason to envy that condition.

I found something to enjoy in almost every nook and cranny of my life. Even when I felt hard done by, I could always find some mischief to pull myself out of the doldrums. Then I was too busy running for my life to worry about anything else. Mischief, in and of itself, is not all bad. I classed it as entertainment.