

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

(As the youngest in the family logging camp, Tom reluctantly begins to outgrow his penchant for mischief)

There were a few glitches in the camp that never seemed to get ironed out, and I wouldn't have had it any other way.

These aberrations provided me with countless opportunities to keep the others entertained. Or to work my mischief, if you insist. And to make life more interesting for everybody.

When Fred had been in the camp, all the chores were my responsibility and I did them without question. Like splitting wood and bringing it in, cleaning the stable and feeding the animals and shoveling snow and bringing water from the creek. Those were the winters of the big snows, when we were sliding over the fences come Christmas time.

All that changed upon Loretta's arrival at the camp. I discovered that my protests brought Loretta to the cabin door where she bellowed loud and clear that there would be nothing to eat until all the chores were done. I also discovered, quite by good fortune, that I could follow Loretta into the cabin, complaining about cold feet, wet mitts and sundry other problems. That's where my brothers would find me, after the chores were all neatly done, munching happily and smugly on a piece of the apple pie or homemade bread and preserves that Loretta was so famous for, with my mitts by the stove. I had to suffer, cold stares as my brothers sat down to eat, late for a change. I didn't mind, although I have to admit that I felt a little



Tom McLaughlin

uneasy at times. As someone has said, "It's a long road that has nary a turn". And please take note, I was merely defending myself, not squealing.

My brothers accepted the stratagems, by and large as defensive action. So they weren't out to "get me" in the usual sense. But they also weren't so ready to help me to catch up on my skidding at the end of the day. To overcome this little setback, I developed another little strategy that worked quite well, and brought my brothers back on my team without too much fuss, albeit reluctantly.

It snowed often in those days, and it was considered a very serious matter to leave logs in the bush unskidded. Every log meant food on the table, if it snowed a lot, logs could get buried and not found until spring. Then they couldn't be brought out across the swamps. The worms could leave them unsalvageable before the next winter. When my brothers left the bush without a backward glance. Topsy, the pig and I closed up shop too, and followed close behind. I just let it slip at the supper table, that there seemed to be a storm coming, and that I hadn't finished the skidding that day.

That was all that Loretta needed to hear. It gave her that much cherished excuse to stick her nose into Clifford's area of operation without really getting tangled up. There would be no supper the

next evening, until the last log was on the skidway. Just the way Dad would have said it, and just as penetrating.

The feelings of power were overwhelming, when I made these clever ideas work for me. It's interesting how, with a little thinking and planning, one can sometimes work opposing forces to one's advantage. You just have to be careful not to bring too much damage down on your own head.

Despite the brittle atmosphere, the operation as a whole was running relatively smoothly. We were producing more logs than ever before. The gang seemed confident that we were going to have the cutting done, and the logs hauled across the swamps well before the spring thaw. This happy development kept father off our backs, and made his trips to the camp more infrequent. To a man, we hated it when he came to the camp to work with us for awhile. Not only were we suddenly doing everything wrong, but we felt that he was stealing our thunder. He wasn't above taking the credit for, and chortling about, the magnificent log dump that he had compiled, as if he had done it single-handedly.

In my obsession to be the best skidder around, I felt myself slowly edging my way into the upper caste that I longed so much to be part of. I knew that, to be fully integrated into this exclusive club, I would have to abandon, or at least tone down, my love for stirring up controversy. I was reluctant to go that far. It was a tough decision, and I didn't want to see all the work that I had put into my sideline go to waste. It took a lot of practice to get where I was. I still had a lot of tricks up my sleeve yet, that I felt had a lot of potential and could do with developing. Good ideas are not like hens in the night. Their roosts on the filaments of the mind can be fleeting, indeed.