

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

(Last week, Tom discovered that his pet sow was pregnant. This week, he tries to use a bout of the flu as an excuse to get out of work.)

The sow was fast. So fast that sometimes she was back on the trail before Topsy got by with the log. This presented the real danger of her getting her legs broken by a rolling, bouncing log.

All in all, it was a euphoric time for me. I was looking forward to having a colt to play with in my spare time during the summer months. And a pet sow shouldn't cause any problems when I played with her young.

Christmas was a few days away, and I developed the most marvelous flu. It couldn't have come along at a better time. My throat was swollen, and coughing, and eating were a nightmare. The ailment incapacitated me, and, consequently, left me useless around the camp. This happy happenstance created an incongruous, oxymoronic kettle of fish, in which I steeped delightedly. I have never enjoyed being so sick as a dog, before or since.

Lest I contaminate the whole camp, or other complications might occur, Loretta bundled me onto the sleigh and removed me to the farm. I was home for Christmas!

Everything was working out a little too well. I should have been nervous. But I had no time for that distraction. In all this process, I managed to contaminate both the camp, and the farmhouse. Everyone was sick by Christmas Eve. Everyone except me. Because I had a jump on the rest of the gang, I was over most of my illness by that time. I was looking forward to having a great Christmas,



*Tom
McLaughlin*

What? With not being so sick, and all!

That's when the damn flu bug wrought its worst on the rest of the family. The family took a quick vote, and designated me best suited to do the farm chores for the remaining period of their illness. And that also meant trekking to the camp twice a day, to feed and water Topsy and the sow. In my excitement over Christmas, and being home before the others, I completely forgot to play my cards right. Have you ever tried to recall a flu that just keeps on getting better?

To make matters worse, the flu hadn't yet finished its work, when measles offered a helping hand. There was an epidemic in the area, and Christmas visiting assured the spread.

I never did figure out if it was because I was out of the house so much doing the chores, or because the family had an edge in this one. I couldn't for the like of me, bring on the fever, enough rash or that downcast look so necessary for the successful swaying of popular opinion, to illicit enough sympathy to be sent to bed. I was given an extension on my mandate to keep on choring.

It actually felt good to be back at the camp and away from the hated farm chores. It took us a little longer to fill our winter quota, because of the

extended holiday.

The last day of the log-cutting phase came. It was a grueling day and I was pushing Topsy hard. My brothers let me know at the supper table the night before that they would be leaving for the farm the instant that they had reached their count, which they expected to do by early afternoon. They wouldn't be stopping for lunch and I could expect no help from them to finish the skidding.

Under ordinary circumstances, I wouldn't have minded so much being left behind. As a matter of fact, there was something heroic about being out there alone, tying up loose ends. Sometimes, in the past, I harnessed Topsy on a Sunday and went out to skid in the stragglers. I had nothing to do anyway, and, to me, daytime sleeping was a ridiculous waste of time. And the exercise kept Topsy's joints from stiffening up.

This last day, though, I dared not be left behind. I had no intention of missing out on the homecoming ceremonies, I wanted to be at the head of the parade. A sort of Ulysses, if you will.

I was very aware that Loretta had lost her leverage with the coming of the last day. My umbrella was pretty well shredded, and my arsenal of strategies lay out there somewhere beyond recall. I could look forward to nothing but stark bull work, this last day. There was no more opportunity for my sister to withhold supper, or to lock my brothers out of the cabin, until the skidding and chores were done. Her broom had lost it vigor, and lay languidly in its corner.

No-matter! Loretta swung into action! I was working back and forth between the fallers and the skidway. In my hurry I failed to take notice of the effect the grueling pace was having on Topsy. An oversight I was to regret.