

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

*(In our last episode, Tom just managed to stay out of the battle that erupted when his brothers falsified the log count at the family logging camp)*

Clifford had given up on trying to keep his gang working. Loretta's roar brought our heroes up to the skidway, like so many puppies answering their mistress' call.

Now, I'm not going to ask you to believe that they were all that cowed by Loretta. But none of us wanted word to get back to father that we had short-counted on purpose. If we were going to pull these shenanigans, and in case we got caught, it had to look accidental. You understand? One thing you have to say for us, we almost never rattled on each other. We never knew when we might need the other guy's backing.

When a scheme of this sort erupted, and we all saw in it the potential for getting away from work early, or getting out of doing the job altogether, if it wasn't going to bring too much harm down on our own heads, nor do an awful lot of harm to the operation in general. We would argue tooth and nail against it, all the time, hoping that the eruptor would win out. Then we would know that at least we tried. There was only one left then to deal with his conscience.

When one of us got caught in a scheme, the others would scratch like cats to cover for him. But often the dirt clung to all of us, like the proverbial dung to the blanket.

At that age, Clinton didn't like work, and at this



Tom  
McLaughlin

particular time I was rooting for him to win out. When he was in the camp, Fred had once accused Clinton of being so lazy that when he needed a bowel movement at night, he went in the bed and just kicked it to the foot. I used this description frequently on him for a while after that, when I wanted to needle him. But only when I was a good distance away.

When Clinton wanted to pull something, he was the smoothest talker among us. I could see that he was wearing Loretta down. And he was cunning enough to know that she couldn't prove his latest scheme, that of getting out of the bush early by pretending that they had reached their count unexpectedly.

Guilt was blaring from the demeanor of the renegades. Loretta wasn't about to let them off the hook easily. She was demanding that the new skidded logs be counted, which of course, was impossible. It hadn't snowed for a few days, and all the logs on the skidway looked new-skidded. But I wasn't saying a word. All this turmoil had allowed me to catch up.

With a almost silent cluck of the tongue, I headed Topsy to the barn. This was just the break I was watching for. We stopped at the creek long enough

for the animals to drink. I lodged them in the barn, threw them enough fed to last them until the next morning when I intended to return for them, and then I scooted over the hill towards home. I heard someone yelling at me. Fortunately, the road was very crooked at that point. If they couldn't see me, then I couldn't hear them, right? I sped on my way.

It was a Saturday, and the homecoming was all that I expected it to be. Except for one harsh reality: the farm chores were waiting for me, and things were in a mess. My younger brother and sister weren't doing the job the way I used to. I won't go into the grim details. It had mostly to do with manure, so I'll just skip that part.

The kids (I could call them kids now, because I was now a man), were as glad to see me as I was to see them. After the hero worshiping and the chores were done with, we went sliding on the surrounding hills. It felt good to be home.

I loved the isolation and the freedom of the logging camp, and the great boost the odyssey gave me on the hazardous road to manhood. Oh, I know I would have made it anyway. But the winter away from home put me over the top.

As much as I enjoyed the camp life, life at the farm was a decided improvement. Take the personal hygiene facilities, for instance. The outhouse had a roof and reasonably secure walls. The Eaton's catalogue was protected from the elements, and the occupant was in out of the wind. The facility at the camp was a few poles spiked between two stumps, hidden in a grove of balsam. The builder had neglected to remove the rough bark and the knofs from the poles. Have you ever tried to pull the pages of a wet or frozen catalogue apart? Loretta kept a pail in her corner of the cabin. But it was worth your life to try to use it?