❑ Rita LaVoie

As part of the Montana Historical Society's Montanans At Work Oral History Project, Mary Melcher interviewed Milltown native Rita (Thibodeau) LaVoie on Dec. 19, 1981, in LaVoie's Missoula home. Parts of the conversation follow. A recording of this interview, along with many others of Milltown and Bonner residents and workers, can be checked out from the archives at the University of Montana's Mansfield Library.

Mary Melcher: Rita, you were born in Milltown?

Rita Lavoie: Yes.

Mary Melcher: What date was that?

Rita LaVoie: July 28, 1905.

Mary Melcher: What were your parents' names?

Rita LaVoie: My mother was Caroline St. Pierre, and my father was Fredrick R. Thibodeau. And they were born in New Brunswick, both of 'em. My mother was born in Edmundston, New Brunswick, and my father in Riviere Verte, which translates Green River.

Mary Melcher: Did they come here together?

Rita LaVoie: No, my father came here when he was about 18. He was a river man. He came here to work.

Mary Melcher: In Milltown?

Rita LaVoie: Around Bonner, yes. There was no way to live any more back where they were. They had large families. There were 14 in my father's family. And they just had to get out and find other places, and the West was opening up so everybody came this way.

Mary Melcher: He came to work in the mill?

Rita LaVoie: No, he went out on river drives and in the logging camps, they used to have logging camps those days. And that's where he was.

Mary Melcher: How did he meet your mother?

Rita LaVoie: Well, I don't know exactly. But my mother came out ... See, my father was seven years older than my mother, and she came out – see her family, there were 10 – and she came out to live with an aunt, because times were so difficult back there that they allowed her to come here. I don't know exactly how old she was, but she did go to the Central School in Missoula. The old Central School. And my aunt lived down on what they called the Island, on Levasseur Street and Clay Street and those places. That was all filled in there the river separated, sort of had a channel there, and Levasseur and Clay Street and all those were the Islands. Well, it was filled in later on and homes 24built.

And then of course in later years the river was diverted once more away from the Wilma Building and they're using all that land.

Mary Melcher: Back to your parents. Your mother, she didn't ever work outside the home, did she?

Rita LaVoie: No, my mother never worked outside.

Mary Melcher: And did she marry when she was about 18?

Rita LaVoie: Something like that. Now I don't know just where my folks met. I think my father had gone to St. Regis to work on a log drive. Meanwhile, my aunt and uncle had moved there – or her aunt and uncle – they were my great aunt and uncle. And I think that's where they met.

Mary Melcher: And you were born in 1905. Do you know when they married?

Rita LaVoie: They were married in 1904 in Wallace, Idaho, and then they came to Milltown to work.

Mary Melcher: You had one brother. Is he younger than you?

Rita LaVoie: Uh-huh. Two years.

Mary Melcher: When did your father buy the bar that he had in Milltown?

Rita LaVoie: Well, he didn't buy it, he established a bar in Milltown. It was about 1907 or '08. It must have been around that, because the 1908 flood took the bridge out that was at Milltown,. You went way down sort of a little hill to get on the bridge. The river was low, it was just a channel. The dam wasn't in then. So it must have been maybe around 1907 or '08 when he opened the saloon, because I think that's when they started putting the dam in. Now the freeway is crossing at Milltown where McCormick's hill used to be. And they used to ford the river with a horse and buggy there and come up McCormick's hill and come into Milltown and Bonner and Piltzville. The doctors and so on, they made all house calls. We didn't come into Missoula for anything if it could be helped. So it must have been then, and I learned later on there was a big farm there above the dam, the McCormicks owned the farm. And that's where they came out, up McCormicks' hill. We kids of course, after the dam was in, why when the river froze we used McCormick's hill for sliding and went out on the river.

Mary Melcher: What did you slide on?

Rita LaVoie: We had sleds. Sure. My kids used my sleds and finally demolished them. I wanted to save them for the next generation but they were kind of rough.

Mary Melcher: Was he making a good enough wage to be able to invest in the bar, in the saloon?

Rita LaVoie: Well, you venture, just as anyone else ventures sometimes when they

start in business. Today it isn't that simple. You almost have to have money to make money. But those days all the lumberjacks coming in there, and naturally on payday the saloon was the first place they went, many of them. So he made a good living. And then he took his brother too in with him. And the well that they dug is still holding, and the trouble they're having right now with this arsenic problem at Milltown, that well is still okay.

Mary Melcher: The well that your father dug?

Rita LaVoie: Yeah. But they went 220 feet. And the other wells, I never remember from the time I was a little child that they were able to use that water for cooking or drinking or anything else. You just couldn't use it. But I still think it was from the tailings from the mines in Butte. Because the water there was so coppery sometimes we'd go on the river and swim over on that side on the Clark Fork, which we called the Hellgate in those days. And if you ever got it in your mouth you were really sick. I don't think it's coming from the old dump that they're speaking of in the paper today. I think it's from that.

Mary Melcher: So you played along the river in the winter and in the summer too?

Rita LaVoie: Oh, yes, I spent my time on the river in a canoe and swimming, rolling logs, chub fishing (laughs).

Mary Melcher: And you went to school in Bonner?

Rita LaVoie: Started school in Bonner, went through the eighth grade there in Bonner. It was the best school in the county, and still is. I'll have people argue that with me, but I'm sorry, it's still classed as the best school in this county. Good discipline there too. Not too long ago I went up to a scout meeting of some kind there, and the principal happened to be there, and to show you what beautiful discipline they have, one of the boys wanted to go to the restroom, I guess, and so he met the principal in the hall and asked him if he might go. No tearing up of the building. Good discipline.

Mary Melcher: And that's the way it was when you went there?

Rita LaVoie: Once in awhile the parents were the greater part of the discipline. Parents are always I think the worst part of teaching.

Mary Melcher: The parents made it more difficult for there to be a lot of discipline?

Rita LaVoie: Well, sure. Yes, it's always been that way in schools. Of course, years ago they did have those people that were disciplinarians, period. They were harsh. But as you go on in your teaching you might learn that the parents are the worst problem in the school. If they were to back the teacher and have good discipline, you wouldn't have the trouble in the schools you're having today. But the parents are sort of bad.

Mary Melcher: After you went to the Bonner School, you came to school in

Mary Melcher: After you went to the Bonner School, you came to school in Missoula. Which school was that?

Rita LaVoie: I went to Sacred Heart Academy.

Mary Melcher: And how did you travel back and forth?

Rita LaVoie: Street car. And I'll have to tell you something. My folks didn't know of it, but since I went to a private school instead of MHS, why, my tickets were not supposed to be free. I'd have to pay for them. And we didn't know that. I was innocent of it, and I know my mother must have been...

Mary Melcher: MHS was Missoula High School?

Rita LaVoie: Missoula High School, the old one. It's on Higgins Avenue. I think they call it Hellgate now. The other one is Sentinel, the new one on South Avenue. I hope I'm being intelligent there (laughs). Anyhow, I got my tickets free, from one of the men on the school board. And his wife was very anti-Catholic, and she found out that I was getting tickets so, ha, that caused a little unpleasantness in our home. And of course he had to come and say something to my mother, but she was glad to pay the tickets. I had to pay my fare then.

Mary Melcher: Was there a lot of anti-Catholic sentiment in the community in Milltown?

Rita LaVoie: There still is in places. Now there isn't up there any more. It's quite ecumenical, because I was laughing the other day I was up there to a doings, I was invited to the Lutheran Christmas party, and I said, "You know, when I'm up here I'm more Lutheran than Catholic. I know so many Lutherans."

Mary Melcher: But when you were growing up there was anti-Catholic feeling?

Rita LaVoie: There were some people. Now these people, the woman was from the East, and I just wonder what was wrong with her. But there has been, and there still are some people that way.

Mary Melcher: Did you visit with children from other ethnic groups?

Rita LaVoie: I should say I did. I couldn't see that I was any different than anyone else around there.

Mary Melcher: Were you brought up to think that you were different because you were French-Canadian?

Rita LaVoie: No, my folks didn't say too much.... Only once I remember, I got out on the river all afternoon. And I wasn't much to sunburn, but this day I stayed too long in the water, out of the water, lying on the booms, and so on. I was out there with a young man that was Finnish, and my father was really burned up. He was working on the river and so I didn't mind staying out there because he could observe me every minute that he was there. I wasn't into any mischief of any kind. Or you wouldn't have thought of it, anyhow. Some of them do

now, but anyhow I'm right in back of our home. And so when he came home I was really suffering with sunburn, and he says, "Well, I suppose you're going to wind up marrying a Finlander." (Laughs). I said, 'Well – never know." I couldn't have done very badly had I. They've got nice homes, they're all really (??) people, they're home people.

Mary Melcher: But he thought it would be a bad thing?

Rita LaVoie: At the moment, I guess. If I hadn't married a Frenchman, oh boy. But I couldn't see that, that the Frenchmen were all that special. And I couldn't see that I was any different than the Finnish boys and girls, and I couldn't see that I was any different than the Swedish boys and girls, at all.

Mary Melcher: Did your mother have an idea about being separate from the other ethnic groups?

Rita LaVoie: Well, she didn't say so much, excepting once. There were some folks that I had gone to school with – they're still living around here, some of them – were Syrian. And she absolutely forbade me to ever go there. It hadn't entered my head to go to their home because they lived so far away. But that's the first place I went after I was forbidden to go there, because I didn't see that they were any different than myself. Their skin was a little darker, who cares?

Mary Melcher: Did she ever find out that you went there?

Rita LaVoie: No, I didn't say anything. I could travel those days. I was just like a deer. I'd gone way up to Turah. They lived at Turah. And visited with them. The mother was so nice. She was expecting her 15th child, and she says, "Don't ever have a family like this." I can remember her telling me. Of course, that went over my head, you know. I didn't understand it.

Mary Melcher: Was there any group that was looked down upon more than the others?

Rita LaVoie: Well, there was one, they were kind of poor. But I don't know why people should have looked down on them. This poor family. He spoke, oh, you could get by in English, you know. But I'll just give you an idea of their accent. For troubles, he'd say, "uh-rubbles," and for children "chillainos" and things like that, but I understood them. And one winter they lost four children, or five, I don't remember which ... four, to diptheria. And the same time he had his hand cut off, excepting the thumbs remained is all. And the woman didn't lose her mind, but she sort of wandered, you know. But always was home taking care of the children and so on. Then she had one little girl later in life, and that poor little thing, she's living here close to where I'm living right now. She says, "You remember I used to follow you everywhere." And

people sort of, instead of holding a hand out to this lady, even the Finnish people ...

Mary Melcher: Was she Finnish?

Rita LaVoie: Yes. They should have gone in to help her and do things for her. But they didn't. You know. But they got along, and later they built a new house. And she had a daughter that lived in Butte, and became ill and came home and was bedridden. She took care of her. I used to go see her. I wasn't supposed to go there either. But I couldn't see that.

Mary Melcher: You weren't supposed to visit the Finnish people?

Rita LaVoie: Not that family. But I know why now, because the girl had, well, not led too good a life and she's dying. And her mother was very careful that I didn't go near her, I can remember that. Though she wasn't that bad off. And then there was another family. They were French. Very gifted. Those children, all of them sang like, well, you would have sworn they were trained for opera. That's what they sang. All of them. And I wasn't supposed to go there either, because this woman was known to chew tobacco and smoke cigarettes, which was really forbidden those days. Women didn't do things like that. And of course I went to school with her children, and I couldn't see as a young child why I shouldn't visit her. She was ill, she was bedridden. So I used to go see her. And I remember once she offered me a cigarette, and I was – huh, you know – and she laughed. She never would have given it to me, she just wanted to see. But she took a holy picture off of her wall and gave it to me. I still have it. It's full of fly specks and what have you. We didn't have screens those days. And I'll never forget how beautiful she was. She had the most beautiful white hair. And I couldn't see a thing wrong with that family.

Mary Melcher: Was she French-Canadian?

Rita LaVoie: She was French some kind. I don't know what. You know. And I don't recall ever seeing the father. There must have been one some place, but I don't recall. He maybe was at work when I was over there. I went to school with the boy, and the girls. They were a little older than I. But when their mother died, the girls were sent over to Helena, to the girls' school there. They used to have a school ... But when they came back they were grown women. On Sundays you never heard such concerts as those young people put on. They'd get together after church on Sundays and the singing was unbelievable.

Mary Melcher: And she was looked down upon because she smoked cigarettes and chewed tobacco?

Rita LaVoie: Yeah, or snuff or whatever it was she used.

Mary Melcher: And your mother didn't think that was ladylike?

Rita LaVoie: Not only my mother. Everybody – Finnish and the Swedish and all them.

Mary Melcher: So if somebody disobeyed a social rule they were outcast.

Rita LaVoie: Well, yeah, but I was the disobedient child, if they had only known, because I could not see why that woman was different. Had she run a house of prostitution perhaps I would have been wise enough to catch on and I would have avoided her. Children, you know, know more than people give them credit for. You sense things, probably, you can't put your finger on them, but you sense them. So I wouldn't have gone near the place. But I didn't think there was anything wrong with it. So what?

Mary Melcher: There were boarding houses that a lot of single men lived in. Were they places that you weren't supposed to walk by?

Rita LaVoie: No. No no. They were very very clean, straight. No prostitution, nothing like that allowed. It was only men that lived in those places. There was one over... Well, some folks by the name of Willett had it. That building stands in back of Disbrow's store in Milltown. Now the main road used to go in front of the boarding house and the store. The store used to face the road. And after the streetcars went out and Disbrows got the store they opened it the other way. And we had a man, Oscar Hemgren, that owned the store; he had built the place. And the post office was also part of the store. He had the post office too. But that was the boarding house there. And some of the Finnish people used to have two or three men to board. And there was a place, a Mrs. Hamma, had boarders. They were Finnish men that worked at the mill, all single. And they boarded at her place. And then some folks by the name of Violette, Mrs. Frank Violette, she was related to the Levasseurs of Missoula, built a boarding house there at Milltown down on First Street toward the lumber yard and had boarders there. And then she died and a lady by the name of Mrs. Henry Petroff had it, then some folks by the name of Kyle had it, and then something happened to the building, it was burned or something, and they tore it down.

In Bonner, they had a place in the yards, for the men. They had a bunkhouse, a large bunkhouse, the men stayed. And then a big cookhouse, they had a cook hired there, and they also had a laundry where the men had their laundry done. And the men at Milltown, I don't know how they got along on their laundry, if they took it to private homes. The Finnish women did a lot of beautiful work, and they were strong, oh my goodness, and washed on the board. But they'd come from Finland, all of them, and they thought they were in heaven when they got washing boards. I know if we ever

had a fire at Milltown, the Finnish women manned the wells. They pumped water. We'd stand there and marvel at the strength of those women.

Mary Melcher: They pumped water because they were stronger?

Rita LaVoie: One hand, believe me. And the well was really putting out water. (Laughs) You bet.

Mary Melcher: Did you have very many fires?

Rita LaVoie: Oh no. But on occasion we had them. Everybody got out then. But it was the Finnish women that were there manning the pumps. I just adored those people. You know, my best friends I think that I've had were with the Finnish and the Swedish. I couldn't say the French, so much. There was a lot of envy among them.

Mary Melcher: Among the French?

Rita LaVoie: Oh, yeah. Some of 'em. But anyhow I was a tomboy, so I didn't worry too much about that.

Mary Melcher: Your father birled logs? What was his job called?

Rita LaVoie: He was a river man.

Mary Melcher: River man. And he broke up log jams?

Rita LaVoie: Just a minute. I told you when we'd come to that I'd show you the 1908 log jam. (Pause) See, that's the 1908 picture of... Mr. Charles Kennedy, who lives in Dixon, had this picture and he let me borrow it so I could have one made from it.

Mary Melcher: Did you ever worry about your father being a river man?

Rita LaVoie: No.

Mary Melcher: Did your mother worry?

Rita LaVoie: No. I don't think she realized.

Mary Melcher: Did you ever watch him break up the logjams?

Rita LaVoie: A few, but not many. Because we weren't allowed around there, you know. And this was quite a ways from home, and I was quite tiny.

Mary Melcher: So he would be traveling?

Rita LaVoie: The ACM used to send him into Idaho. I don't know just where. Actually I remember hearing the name Holt, but I can't remember where a river, there's a river around there, unless it was the Pend O'rielle River.

Mary Melcher: What does ACM stand for?

Rita LaVoie: Anaconda Copper Mining Company.

Mary Melcher: He was hired by them.

Rita LaVoie: Yes, they had the mill at Bonner then, see, before they sold out to Champion. The ACM always had that. And they were good to their men. I think the people are beginning to learn too that they didn't appreciate the

ACM quite as much as they should have. They were marvelous, they helped the school, always doing something for the school. When I went to school, we didn't pay for books, we didn't pay for pencils, paper, nothing. It was all furnished. But the teachers also were on the job. We were taught to save, we were taught not to waste.

Mary Melcher: By the teachers?

Rita LaVoie: Oh, yes. We were taught manners. We were taught this and that. We had one teacher from Wisconsin who was beautiful. Oh, what a woman. And once in a while she didn't mind mentioning God to us, which was wonderful. I'll never forget the time she asked how many of us knew the Lord's Prayer. I was so embarrassed. It's a wonder I went back to school. None of us moved a muscle. Had never heard it, the Our Father called the Lord's Prayer. We were always taught the Our Father. Well, all of us knew it, the Lutherans included because they all went to class, you know. But we never did discuss religion. So I got an education right there: The Lord's Prayer was the Our Father. But she was beautiful. She was a nice woman. And my first grade teacher I had was exceptional(??). And I had a second grade teacher that was very nice. And then Eunice Brown, who was Eunice Morris at the time, was another exceptional teacher. And this Myrtle Rossiter, she was something. When we studied poetry or anything like, she took it almost line by line, and we understood every bit of it before we went on. One of them was the story of Evangeline. If she hadn't explained all this we'd have just read it, and so what? We'd have forgot every bit of it. But she took parts of it, like:

Here stands the forest primeval ... The whispering pines and the hemlock.

Why she could just make you see them. And another part that was in there was:

"Silently one by one, in the infinite meadows of heaven, blossom the lovely stars, the forget-me-nots of the angels."

And things like that. Oh, she was something.

Mary Melcher: That's great. Well, your father taught you to birl logs?

Rita LaVoie: Oh yeah. (laughs)

Mary Melcher: And you competed as a young girl with men birling logs?

Rita LaVoie: No, I competed just with the older boys there at Milltown. There was no contest that anyone else was observing. Just playing. My father wanted to enter me here in Missoula once, against two men, and my mother wouldn't allow it, because I was too old, I was 15.

Mary Melcher: Explain how you'd birl a log.

Rita LaVoie: Well, you'd just stand on them and get your feet going, make the log roll

in the water. Go a pretty good speed. And then all of a sudden, why, you'd plant your feet on either side of the log real quick and throw your opponent off. Now I rolled barefooted. And many of them birled with caulked shoes.

Mary Melcher: What's a caulked shoe?

Rita LaVoie: It's got these little sharp things in, men wear in the woods to keep from slipping and falling and to walking on logs ... All the loggers wear them.

Mary Melcher: But you felt it was easier barefoot?

Rita LaVoie: Well, I didn't know any different, but my father was going to enter me against these two men, and I was just sick and so was he when we watched them birl. It wouldn't have been anything to throw them off.

Mary Melcher: And you didn't go into that contest. Why not?

Rita LaVoie: My mother wouldn't allow it. I was too old. Wasn't proper for girls to do things like that (laughs). You know, the frills and the bows and all that stuff – I couldn't stand myself. Like Jimmy Durante (??). When they'd try to put frills on me, my nose would almost light up, my hands felt like snow shovels. Ohh, couldn't stand it. But my mother was very feminine and she liked things like that. And I was the thorn in her side. My brother should have been the girl. (Laughs). I was one of those brats. You know.

Mary Melcher: You still had good childhood though, it sounds like. Even though your mother wanted you to be more feminine, you still had a lot of fun doing different things.

Rita LaVoie: Oh, yes. I had a lot of fun.

Mary Melcher: What did the Finnish people call you?

Rita LaVoie: They called me Reeta. Reeta Tee-ba-doe. That was my name for Thibodeau.

Mary Melcher: Were you one of their favorites?

Rita LaVoie: I don't know. They seemed to like me. All my friends, as I say, were Finnish and Swedish.

Mary Melcher: Did any of them go to high school with you?

Rita LaVoie: No. They went over to MHS. I went to Sacred Heart. None of them were Catholics. Here two years ago at Bonner School we had a doing, and my mother told me that I was one of the first children born in Milltown. With the exception of one Finnish boy. And I never did know who he was. Went to school with him, if you please. And so they asked who had lived in that community the longest, from birth. And this young old man got up – he looked young to me yet – and he was born and raised there. He was 75 years old, the same age I was. That was last year. So I said, "So you're the Finn boy

that my mother told me about that was born about when I was. We were the first two born up there. That was George Pataja. I think he'd be proud to have me mention his name.

Mary Melcher: Did you like your high school too? Did you get a good high school education?

Rita LaVoie: Yes. I resented leaving my class, you know, as anyone would, and going to the Catholic school. But I'll never regret having gone to these nuns. My, the things I learned, you know. There was beauty there that you don't get any other places. I don't know what the Catholic schools are right now, but the nuns then were so disciplined. And of course they were understanding too. We had some just like anyone else that were teachers, you had them in the lay people that are teachers and some that aren't. But we had some excellent teachers. We had one that her dream was to establish a college, and she is the one that established the college in Great Falls. Her sisters and herself were very brilliant women.

Mary Melcher: When you say it was beautiful, how do you mean?

Rita LaVoie: Well, the discipline, the way of life, and the nice things... They taught us how to dance. We were taught how to set table, how to serve, how to save. And manners. And just self-discipline.

Mary Melcher: And all the subjects too.

Rita LaVoie: The subjects, of course, were just like any other schools, nothing different, excepting we took religion, and we opened school at 8 o'clock in the morning so we weren't infringing on time put out by the public school from 9 'til 4. We had religious classes. And I know I was most ignorant on religion, didn't know anything, and it happened that one of the popes was being elected. And the teacher asked if we knew how they arrived at getting a new pope. So we sat there like Sphinxes. One girl, Lois Edwards, she wasn't Catholic, stood up and told how they arrived at selecting a pope. So you can imagine Rita got right down to business and started studying, learning something about her religion. Now, this woman lives in Salmon, Idaho, now. I understand she was teacher. And what was her name? Mrs. Joe Denny, I think. She lives at Salmon and I've been wanting to go down there and look her up.

Mary Melcher: OK. Umm. How did you like riding on a street car?

Rita LaVoie: It was fun. And the street car motormen had as much trouble with the kids now as the guys that drive bus.

Mary Melcher: How long did it take you to get back and forth?

Rita LaVoie: Oh, about half an hour. I know the streetcars go by at Milltown at 25

after 7 in the morning, so I'd get out. It'd go to Bonner and by 7:30 then it'd be back. But see all the stops they made along the road, it took about half an hour. It'd stop on what they call the Flats now, West Riverside, where the brick building is located, where the Clark's mill had their offices. There was a mill there, you know. Well, the street car stopped there, then it stopped in two places in Pine Grove, at Marshall Grade, East Missoula two or three places, and then on the east side here, on Van Buren it stopped. All the different places. It came under the underpass and immediately followed the railroad tracks across the Rattlesnake there on ... Pine Street? Yeah. Pine Street. And then turned and went down Madison, and then turned and went up Cedar, which is now Broadway.

Mary Melcher: How many times would it run in the morning?

Rita LaVoie: It came out every hour. And on Saturday nights they had a 12 o'clock car, so you could take the 12 o'clock car and get back here and arrive home at 12:30.

Mary Melcher: Did you go into Missoula on weekends too?

Rita LaVoie: No. We didn't make unnecessary trips. You know, we didn't find that we had to be doing this and that, and doing so much shopping. I don't know why. I suppose it was different, but people did without so many things, they just didn't have to have everything as we do now. What just seems they're necessities. Are they really? I'm toying with the idea of buying a small deep freeze. Well, it saves trips to the store. But those days we lived right there on the footsteps of the butcher shop and the store, well, why did we have to come to Missoula? And I wore a pair of shoes two years. And I was so proud of that. My feet didn't grow very fast, and I couldn't understand after I started high school, every six months I had to have my shoes resoled. It was the cement that wears the shoes. I ran on those rocks at Milltown, wore shoes two years. That was a proud thing with me, being able to take care of my shoes (laughs).

Mary Melcher: So you were brought up to be conservative and saving.

Rita LaVoie: My mother couldn't stand to have the soles of her shoes wet. Well, then you ruin 'em.

Mary Melcher: OK, let's briefly talk about what you did. You married during your senior year of high school, and then you lived in Milltown...

Rita LaVoie: 'Til '27. We moved to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Then I came back during World War II in '43.

Mary Melcher: Came back to...

Rita LaVoie: Missoula.

Mary Melcher: And you had four children?

Rita LaVoie: Three.

Mary Melcher: Three children. OK. When you married where did you live with your husband?

Rita LaVoie: In Milltown.

Mary Melcher: What was your work like around the house?

Rita LaVoie: Everything was a brand new experience. I had never worked a day in my life. I didn't even know how to peel a potato. I wished some of the women who were good at that could have watched. It would have been an education. I'd start about 9 in the morning to peel potatoes for noon. I was really good with a paring knife. It was really something. I didn't know a thing about it, but I just learned. Kept trying and trying and trying, finally got it. I can't say that I'm the best cook in the United States. If I never saw a kitchen again I'd be supremely happy. But anyhow, (laughs) I learned. I used to make all my bread and rolls and things. I know we had some little Russian children that used to live near us when I lived in Coeur d'Alene, and they'd go to their mother and they'd say, "Oh, Mother. She makes bread that tastes just like cake." I'd put a little more sugar in mine.

Mary Melcher: So your mother hadn't taught you how to cook?

Rita LaVoie: No. I didn't know a thing. Never had done housework in my life. She thought I was going to be a great musician, and I could not explain to her that I knew my limitation, and I would never be great, but I could enjoy myself. Probably play for them and they'd enjoy it, but be a great musician? No. I knew that I didn't have this talent. But I could have been a singer, and that she didn't see. The nuns that sent me to the university, they wanted me to take voice over there. They said, "We can't take you any further." But they didn't see that. And I would have loved to sing. I was a soprano.

Mary Melcher: You mean your folks didn't want to go to the U to sing?

Rita LaVoie: Well, my mother thought it was just a waste of time, taking voice. I was still in high school. And then of course my love was medicine, that's what I wanted to go into. I'd like to have been a surgeon, but women didn't do things like that in my day. They'd have laughed you right out of school. The men made it pretty rough for women. So I started having an inferiority complex, and I don't think I would have lasted very long.

Mary Melcher: In medical school?

Rita LaVoie: Well, on anything. It didn't take much to discourage me. Sometimes accused of things that I knew nothing about, you know, and I developed this. Right now if you were to tell I did this and that, I'd look so guilty you'd swear

I did. And I carried that through the years. I think I was fortunate in a way, when God decided I should be here, I think he created me a naturally happy person, and that was a lifesaver, otherwise I would have gone to the depths, I'm sure.

Mary Melcher: You got through all your troubles?

Rita LaVoie: Yeah, yeah. My children used to say, "Mother, no matter how bad things are you think of something funny." Well, you have to. After awhile it's so ridiculous it becomes a comedy. Really. When you stop and think, no matter how bad things are, all of a sudden you'll see something funny. I've gone to funerals and I think to myself, if I just had a movie camera ... I'll tell you, some of the things people do. Hilarious. I'd gone to one once, there was a man standing there, and he was bored with the whole affair. And I can just see him still. He goes over and leans against a tombstone, puts his elbow on it, leans his head there, and crosses one foot as if he was at the bar, and there he stood. And it's things like that I'll observe in crowds and it's really hilarious if you stop and observe people. Even at funerals. It really is. It's a good thing that I was blessed with this.

Mary Melcher: Well, was it a difficult time when you were first married because you didn't know how to cook and you were pushed into this role of keeping house?

Rita LaVoie: I didn't feel sorry for myself.

Mary Melcher: You enjoyed it?

Rita LaVoie: No, I didn't enjoy it, but I certainly went at it with a will, because, oh boy, that was really hard. I didn't know for nothing, as they say. Some grammar, but that was it.

Mary Melcher: Did you wash on the board?

Rita LaVoie: Yes, I washed on the board. Good thing I was the athlete that I was, 'cause I was strong.

Mary Melcher: And did you have to carry water?

Rita LaVoie: Carried water from the well, pumped the water, carried it, fill the boiler, chop the wood, put it in the stove. Like I say, I'm lucky that I was strong. Then after you warm the water in the boiler, you put it in the washtub so you could wash clothes. And you filled the boiler again, and then another tub to rinse, because you boiled all your clothes those days to get the dirt out, and you used what they called (?) and kerosene was one of the best things to put soap in. Kerosene floated the dirt out of clothes better than anything. And you rinsed them and they smelled real nice. You dried them on the line. Never heard of a dryer, you know. When we first moved here I told some of the

women, I said, "You know, that new house we're in has a solar clothes dryer." They said, "It does? How does that work?" I said you just walk outside with a handful of pins and there's a line there. They were a little irked with me. (Laughs). That's the kind we had. Solar.

Mary Melcher: Did you have an icebox?

Rita LaVoie: No. My mother had one, yes. Those were something. You had a pan under there and you had to check on that every two hours or the water was all over the floor. But anyhow it was an improvement over nothing.

Mary Melcher: Where did you keep things to keep them cold?

Rita LaVoie: (Laughs) I didn't. I just tried to cook you know, just what you'd use.

Mary Melcher: So you went to the store every day?

Rita LaVoie: No, not always. Sometimes a lot of it (spoiled) too, because I had no way of knowing how you did this and that. But I did eventually learn a few things. Well, you had to learn.

Mary Melcher: Did you and your husband control the money together?

Rita LaVoie: No, not always. He usually came home and gave me the check.

Mary Melcher: And you had enough to work with to run the household?

Rita LaVoie: Oh, yes. I could have saved money, but he didn't want to do that. He didn't trust banks. And I used to say, "Well, you know every year here the ACM. closes down for a month or two, and sometimes three. We'd better save money. Well, the first winter we were married, he found out and just worried himself sick about it, but we were able to have credit and then of course when the mill started we paid up finally.

Mary Melcher: Every winter it would close down?

Rita LaVoie: Just about. There'd be a layoff for a little while.

Mary Melcher: And you were prepared for that, but he wasn't?

Rita LaVoie: No, I wasn't prepared 'cause he wouldn't save the money. Had he saved the money we wouldn't have had to charge our groceries and meat.

Mary Melcher: Was that the only year you had to charge your groceries?

Rita LaVoie: Well, he didn't learn too good (laughs). Then he'd worry every year about things. Then when we were in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, during the Depression same thing. And we were established there, and the man had to extend his credit. We owed three hundred some after the Depression. Imagine how much groceries would you buy with three hundred now? You'd be in four, five thousand dollars.

Mary Melcher: In Milltown about every year, did people have to get credit at the store? That was real common?

Rita LaVoie: Well, everybody charged anyhow. Paid once a month. But sometimes

when the mill would lay off for a little while, you had to extend it.

Mary Melcher: What was your husband's job?

Rita LaVoie: Well, he worked in the mill for a while on the green chain, and he was small man. That's hard work, green chain. And he was a tail sawyer.

Mary Melcher: What would he do on the green chain?

Rita LaVoie: Well, you get the wood that comes up that's been sawed new, that comes out of the river. That's hard work. It's green, it's heavy, wet. And then he was a tail sawyer. Now a tail sawyer – they first bring the logs up into the mill and they put them on the carriages, as they call them. Now, they had men riding carriages. Now they're automatic. The sawyer is the one that does everything. And the green boards that would come off, he had to hook and send down another ... there's little rollers that take your waste lumber off into other places somewhere, the burners and so on.

Mary Melcher: Did you just explain two jobs just now, or was that just one job?

Rita LaVoie: First the one was green chain. That's usually when you start work, they put everybody on green chain to see if they want to work. And, boy, that's hard work.

Mary Melcher: And you'd just get the logs, the green lumber, out of the river?

Rita LaVoie: No, it's been cut off, into small, well, maybe 12-inch (foot?) pieces or longer, and they picked it, and that's hard work because it's so heavy. Loaded with water and never dried.. The tail sawyer, now that's a little different again. The first cut they make usually on the carriage. You know the saws make? Well, it's a thin sort of cut where the bark is and so on... They just grab this with a hook when it goes by the rollers, and they send it to a different area. I don't know just where it goes.

Mary Melcher: So he'd have to stand up there and be directing the wood...

Rita LaVoie: Well, he'd grab it with a hook or with his hands and he'd direct it to another direction. That wasn't too bad, there. Then he worked in a grocery store for a while.

Mary Melcher: In Milltown?

Rita LaVoie: Uh huh.

Mary Melcher: He got tired of the mill?

Rita LaVoie: Yeah, and he was a small man. But anyhow, then when we went to Coeur d'Alene he worked in the mill for awhile, and then he had the water wagon. He had a horse and a tank and filled the tank and went around the lumber yards in the mill and furnished fresh drinking water for the men. Everybody had a job.

Mary Melcher: In Milltown, when the Company would lay off people during the

winter, did they resent that?

Rita LaVoie: No.

Mary Melcher: No, it was just accepted.

Rita LaVoie: Well, it wasn't a thing that anyone cried about. We were all living there, and sometimes it wasn't too long, you know. But sometimes it was a little longer. It was just one of those things. It was a way of life. We didn't have contact with the outside world, as they have now. My goodness, Butte and Anaconda, that was ... you may as well have said Zurich, Switzerland. You didn't run around the country like that. And going to Spokane, oh my goodness. First time people ever drove to Spokane and went over the Camel's Hump, the stories that come out of there were really funny. Get up there with a Model T Ford, the gas was low, you'd have to back up and find a place so the gas would go down. And there were a lot of wrecks up on Camel's Hump too, because they didn't control their cars, got going too fast.

Mary Melcher: Do you think people were generally pretty satisfied with the Company?

Rita LaVoie: Sure, everybody was happy.

Mary Melcher: And their wages were high enough to make do?

Rita LaVoie: Yeah, 125 a month, oh boy. It was like that for a long time. I have a letter that was written to my father. He had applied for work at the mill. I knew this man later on in years too. I wish he was here now. I used to rub that note under his nose, telling my father that he had a job, and that if he didn't appear Monday morning – it was real trite the way it was written, I resent it every time I look at it. I've got it somewhere – that there would never be any work for him with the Anaconda Copper Mining Company. Oh, my goodness, they handled their men pretty .That's when the strikes first started. I don't know how old I was when they started having strikes. And Finnish women they carried the signs, you bet, and stood behind their men.

Mary Melcher: In 1917?

Rita LaVoie: Well, I don't know just when it was. I know I was pretty young. They called them, you know, they had the IWW and what all, but women stuck to their men, those Finnish women. The other women were too proud to get out but not those women, they stuck up for their men. And they had to do something with these people that had the big companies because the working conditions in the camps were terrible. And they cleaned up the camps and they had nice camps, and they had cookhouses and facilities so the men could take care of themselves.

Mary Melcher: The camps that were out in the woods?

Rita LaVoie: Yeah, they were lousy and everything else. Bedbugs. I remember my father telling about a young man that came into camp. He said he had the most beautiful curly hair. And he said that man was being eaten alive by lice. They weren't going to allow him in there so all the men would have them, you know? And they wanted him to clean up. I guess he didn't quite understand. They just about killed him, I guess, they put him in a tub right out in the middle of the yard and took brushes and that yellow soap and scrubbed him and cut his hair tight to his head and deloused him and he said he was the happiest fella you ever saw after. Burned his bedroll. Took up a collection and got him a new bed. He said he was able to sleep after that.

Mary Melcher: Did your father support the strike?

Rita LaVoie: Oh, he was in the saloon at the time. I imagine he did. You know, when you're a business you don't say much. You know how that goes.

Mary Melcher: Do you remember conflicts in the community around the strikes?

Rita LaVoie: No, excepting when men were going to work and the Finnish women met them there, gave them a bad time. Oh, the women... and of course you don't strike women in those days. You wouldn't have thought about it. Why, if any man had struck a woman, no matter what, I think that everybody in town would have had his hide.

Mary Melcher: The Finnish women would be there giving them a hard time as they went into work?

Rita LaVoie: Um-huh, meeting them right there at the gate. You bet.

Mary Melcher: The women wouldn't hit the men, would they?

Rita LaVoie: No.

Mary Melcher: Just talk to them?

Rita LaVoie: Yeah. And you couldn't understand half of it anyhow. (Laughs)

Mary Melcher: There was a socialist movement in Milltown around 1917, 1918. Do you remember anything like that?

Rita LaVoie: Well, no, as kids you weren't too interested in things like that. But I do remember the activity, because of the strikes. Of course, that would be a glory in my life. I liked that. Kids, you know.

Mary Melcher: You liked the activity and commotion.

Rita LaVoie: The commotion I felt was fine. I felt more power to 'em. I didn't state it that way, but I really agreed with them. And I was just a child, but I thought it was A-OK.

Mary Melcher: Do you remember what effect World War I had on the community?

Rita LaVoie: World War I, yes. I don't know just what effect, but there were many of the young men that went to war. But now they had what they called Liberty

Bonds, and they would go around campaigning. Anyhow, you'd buy Liberty Bonds. You never knew when they were going to walk into your home and inspect your home to see if you had extra amounts of sugar, coffee, and things like that. And they didn't have search warrants, I assure you.

Mary Melcher: Did they come in very often?

Rita LaVoie: Oh, they went into some homes. They never came into ours. And I had an uncle, they should have gone into his, but they didn't. The older girs begged my aunt once to make taffy, and she said, "You know, that isn't allowed." We weren't allowed to make candy or anything like that. But she agreed that the older girls could make taffy. So they pulled the shades right down tight and the girls proceeded to make taffy and we ate it. I can remember eating some of it. Oh, boy, they put too much vinegar in it, but we ate it all, I tell you. We didn't throw a bit of it out, because we were breaking the law.

Mary Melcher: Were you afraid that night?

Rita LaVoie: Oh, I was kind of a little devil. I kind of relished a little trouble (laughs). If they'd have caught me I'd have been there like a mouse, taking it all in and winking my eye, I guess (laughing). I hate to say this, but everybody thought I was so innocent, but they didn't know what was going on inside.

Mary Melcher: You loved it, huh?

Rita LaVoie: Oh, sure. Just so they didn't catch me it'd be all right. But I was usually pretty careful. ...

Mary Melcher: How did your uncle manage to get more sugar than other people?

Rita LaVoie: Don't ask me. He was the biggest bootlegger in the Northwest when the saloons went dry. How he managed this, that's another story, I'll tell you. But he was liked by people. But don't have any dealings with him, I'll assure you. (laughs) Poor fella.

❑ John H. Toole

Wobblies

From "The Baron, The Logger, The Miner, and Me"

When tourists visit the tomb of Lenin in Moscow's Red Square, they are invited to view the tombs of the great Communist leaders imbedded in the fortress walls. Americans are startled to see the bronze tomb marker of one William Haywood, who lies next to the body of Joseph Stalin. Big Bill Haywood was the leader of the I.W.W. He veered into Marxism and died in Russia, the promised land.

The Industrial Workers of the World was the most radical labor union America has ever seen. Indeed, the I.W.W. was more than radical; it was revolutionary. Its enemies jeered that the initials stood for "I won't work." Its tools were violence, sabotage, subversion, and street riots. And it zeroed in on the logging camps of the Pacific Northwest. The deplorable conditions in these Soviet-like work camps provided a fertile ground for them, and at least in logging camps, their campaign produced results.

Logging camps were a difficult field for unions. They were remote, and workers had to depend upon employer-furnished transportation to get to them. The men were hard drinkers without families and interested in next week's paycheck rather than vague promises of better working conditions and higher wages. If a camp became embroiled in a labor dispute, the men often threw up their hands and drifted to another. In attempting to unionize loggers, the I.W.W. had to infiltrate camps. A "Wobbly" – an I.W.W. member – would get a job, and when ensconced at the camp, would start his destructive work.

One of the Wobbly's specialties was sabotage. He would sneak out and drive a railroad spike into a big log. When the speeding band saw in the sawmill struck the spike, the saw would disintegrate inot a thousand, flying lethal shards of steel. The Wobbly would loosen the rail plates on the logging railroads so that when the Shay engine chugged by, it would derail, careen off into the woods, and turn over. The Wobbly's main joy, however, was frightening horses. He woud hide in the brush alongside a logging chute, and when a horse came by skidding a log, the Wobbly would rush madly out of the brush at the horse, yelling loudly and flapping a blanket. The poor, panicked beast would bolt, perhaps breaking his harness and injuring the skinner. In the meantime, all the horses behind him would be held up.

Wobblies harassed the crew at the Bonner Mill. They would wait at the gates at quitting time, harangue the workers, and pass out literature. Kenneth Ross seethed.

He had started to make improvements in logging camp living conditions, but he would make no improvements under duress. The vicious stalemate went on. All known I.W.W. agitators were blackballed from employment in the woods and mills.

The I.W.W. men erected a tent camp just below the Bonner mill. From here, they would sally forth to the various camps, to public meetings on the streets of Missoula, and first and foremost, to the gates of the sawmill, where they swarmed over the workers coming off shift. At length, Ross had enough. Listen to the words of Hjalmar Karkanen, who witnessed the upshot:

"Your granddad sent a telegram to the Burns Detective Agency in Spokane. These fellows were strike breakers, big, tough men, and they wore derby hats. They hit the Wobby camp before daybreak. They carried billy clubs and guns. The Wobblies never knew what hit 'em. The Burns men waded through the camp beatin' up the Wobblies and settin' fire to the shacks. They shot a fellow who was called the "Silver-tongued Orator." He never made another speech. He got shot in the throat. The Wobblies took off in all directions."

On April 4, 1917, the United States declared war on Germany. By April 10, wildcat strikes started to spread all over western Montana. The timing could not have been worse for the I.W.W. An immense weave of patriotism had swept the country. Sabotage, subversion, and strikes revolted the population, and the Wobblies were immediately labeled pro-German. Indeed, a letter to U.S. Senator Henry Myers from Missoula businessmen stated: "They are insulting the flag, belittling the authority of the government and are increasing in numbers. For weeks they have terrorized the lumber camps." Federal troops should be sent at once "to disperse or arrest these ... traitors." One of the signers of this letter was Kenneth Ross.

But the I.W.W.'s basic goal had some strong support. F. A. Silcox, Regional Forester at Missoula and later Chief U.S. Forester, wrote the Secretary of Labor that "lumberjack," "blanket stiff" and "river pig" have been terms of contempt. ... Little or no effort has been made to liberate the creative energies of the men. They have been treated not quite as good as workhorses."

Burton K. Wheeler, a Quaker and a pacifist, (and soon to be a U.S. senator) refused to use his office as U.S. Attorney to prosecute the Wobbies, and stern, uncompromising U.S. Federal Judge George Bourquin backed Wheeler up.

The Montana National Guard was called out. The Wobblies packed the streets of Missoula "from one side to the other." Some refused to register for the draft. Neither side would negotiate. The Wobblies countered the charges of disloyalty with charges that the war was a "capitalist plot in which the workingman made all the sacrifices."

The strikes dragged on through the summer, shutting down all logging and milling operations. They had the support of nobody. The people were incensed and

disgusted with an organization containing members who refused to register for the draft and who divided capital and labor in a time of national emergency. As the soldiers started embarking for France, intense bitterness was directed at the Wobblies. They were called "yellow curs," and the patriotic American Federation of Labor kept them at a safe distance.

In September the strikes collapsed, and immediately Kenneth Ross did an about-face. On September 15, 1917, he convened a meeting of the Montana Lumberman's Manufacturing Association at the Hotel Florence in Missoula. Wrote Dr. Benjamin Rader, Assistant Professor of History at the University of Montana, in the May, 1967, issue of the *Pacific Historical Review:*

Kenneth Ross of the Anaconda Company, representing a corporation that had already made substantive improvements, led the demand for the education of cooks, standardization of menus, installation of bathing facilities, steel bunks and springs, and [dear to Ross's heart] reading facilities for the men. The individualistic operators argued until past midnight before capitulating to Ross's persuasive patriotic appeals. To guarantee compliance, the Montana lumbermen appointed a special inspector to visit the camps. They also called upon the University of Montana to furnish standardized menus. ... The self-imposed discipline of the lumbermen was a unique step in improving the conditions in Montana logging camps.

And at the Pacific Logging Congress, the *Timberman* magazine quoted Ross as writing that, "after all, the lumberjack is human."

So the hard-driving, hard-headed, uneducated man from Nova Scotia played two ennobling roles in this sad affair. He vastly improved the lot of the lumberjack, and he brought labor stability to the Anaconda camps. The mills and woods of the Company would not be unionized for another twenty-four years, when the AFL-CIO finally succeeded in 1941. Contrast this with the violent labor troubles that plagued the Butte mines during this same period.

One today must feel some empathy with the I.W.W. The union struck out with violence and sabotage against the outrage and exploitation being perpetrated upon the lumberjacks. But it inadvertently launched its attacks at the beginning of a World War, a war that was single-mindedly supported by almost the entire population. Thus the I.W.W. came crashing down in defeat, but its work had a lasting effect on the welfare of the men who toiled in the sawmills and the woods.

Kenneth Ross makes no mention of the I.W.W. struggles in his journal. Perhaps his memories of it were painful, but it was without question his finest hour.

The feature story "Bonner -- on the Blackfoot" appeared in the Sunday Missoulian on July 9, 1922. Its author is unidentified, but it was probably either editor and publisher Martin J. Hutchens or his son John, a reporter.

Bonner – on the Blackfoot

An unconsciously model town with a one word industrial creed "Co-operation" And from the Old Man down to the hotel call boy its people say: "You can't beat it"

The Sunday Missoulian, July 9, 1922

Just as the Nine Mile, with its electric light, baths, beds and other evidences of an advanced civilization, stands as a revelation to old lumberjacks familiar only with logging camps as they were 15 or 20 years ago, so Bonner is full of surprises for those whose experience is limited to the average run of sawmill towns. Bonner is anything but average; it is unusual viewed from any standpoint, whether by the sociologist or the man interested merely in modern phases of industrial development.

"You can't beat it!" proudly affirms Kenneth Ross, the man in charge of the timber land and lumber interests of the Anaconda Copper Mining company in Montana. And among the 500 or 600 people who live and work there "You can't beat it!" is a favorite form of description for everything about the place.

Taking the town's industrial side first, it has a sawmill built not long ago according to plans designed to make it one of the finest and most complete in the world. To this mill comes the timber cut from the slopes of the Bitter Roots by the crews of the Nine Mile camps, and from it emerges daily almost half a million feet of lumber for the Anaconda mines and smelters in Montana, Idaho and Utah. It has a remarkably high per capita production, and its labor turnover is so small that you find among the working crews many men who have been there from 25 to 40 years. But these are items to arrest the attention chiefly of lumbermen, lumber statisticians and efficiency engineers. The most interesting things about it have little or nothing to do with the lumber production directly.

There is a big community garden, for instance, one of the few to survive the fervid "Help-win-the-war" period of 1918; its traveling library, housed in a log train boxcar, which distributes more than a thousand books monthly in the town and among the men of the Nine Mile; its community store, whose

profits revert to the patrons in the form of periodic rebates or dividends; and the amazing number of automobiles owned by mill operatives.

Founded on Confidence

Bonner in fact, has something for all sorts of people to think and talk about, though it does very little talking itself. A theorist dreaming of a new industrial day could go there and immediately become convinced that he discerned at least a glimmer of the dawn. An artist would be charmed with its setting at the confluence of the Missoula and Blackfoot rivers, between grass-carpeted hills rising where the valley and the Hellgate canyon join, while captains of big industries, whose attempts arbitrarily to establish model industrial communities have been disappointing or disastrous, might there obtain a little light on why they failed.

Each in his own way would discover in it the essentials of a model town. All three would promptly discover also that about the only people unaware of its unusual character are those who live here. And if an explanation were sought Kenneth Ross could give it, if he would. He represents the human element, without which any town projected as a model community is merely a reproduction in wood and stone and mortar of blue prints drawn with the idea of exemplifying somebody's philanthropic spirit or to fit an advertising label. He simply put the human element in an industrial village, established primarily to meet the requirements of a great mining corporation for 100,000,000 feet of lumber annually, evolved into a model town so gradually that its inhabitants were aware of nothing more than that they were happy, prosperous and contented.

Some day, when he has the time, Mr. Ross possibly may tell the story of Bonner himself. Until he does many of the details will be unavailable. But this much is obvious to any visitor: he has faith in his fellow men, and embodies his own industrial creed, "Co-operation."

Co-operation and conservation are the underscored words in the Ross lexicon. A huge man of the big-boned breed of the north, he was a lumberjack himself 30 or 40 years ago, and he learned the significance of both amid the savage conditions which beset the men when he worked in the woods. Conservation expresses the guiding principle in the administration of the 1,000,000 acres of land owned by the Anaconda company, Bonner ever since he became the head of the mining corporation's lumber department.

Elaborated, it embraces his fundamental philosophy: "Everybody is as good as he can be, and nobody is as bad as he might be."

"I learned that early in life," he said the other day, "along with the fact that confidence inspires confidence. If you trust a man he usually trusts you."

That is the article of faith on which Bonner rests, and which maintains in it an industrial democracy that elsewhere has sunk deep into the

desuetude since the altruistic theories bred by the stress of war began to wither and die. Its effectiveness was proved at the outbreak of the hostilities, when Bonner experienced its last labor trouble.

"I called the men together," said Mr. Ross, "and put it to them straight. I told them plainly that the time had come to separate the sheep from the goats. They could close the mill down if they wanted to, I said, but I would know if they did that they were not Americans. I called for a showdown and learned that the trouble was due largely to enemy propaganda. Some of the old-timers, who have been here a quarter of century or more, came forward and volunteered the information that certain men were against the country. They didn't want to work with them, they said. 'Well, you give them a hearing, and if you find them guilty, they'll be fired,' I replied. So they went back to work. Every off-color character in town was subjected to a rigid examination, with the result that a lot of men were discharged, one of them being a highly competent foreman, a man who said he simply had foolishly 'shot off his mouth.' An old man who had two sons working with him voted to have them fired when they were found guilty of affiliation with a certain traitorous organization. And the system is in vogue yet. The men in the mill have the say as to who can or who cannot work with them."

Incidentally, the union went out of existence at the same time. It has never been restored. Yet if Mr. Gompers were to visit Bonner tomorrow he would be compelled to admit, after a look at the community garages, and noting the number of cars, that the mill operatives are apparently more prosperous and more contented than they ever were before.

Though his headquarters are in Missoula, Mr. Ross's heart is apparently in Bonner, and he delights to afford the visitor the opportunity to come personally into contact with the men and women and the institutions which gave it its extraordinary character. When he has the time he serves personally as escort and guide, and then the explorer has an interesting afternoon.

The interurban car from Missoula swings into town after passing a vast yard filled with towering piles of lumber in orderly ranks. On the right first appear Bonner's two churches, modest frame structures ranged beside the big, yellow school which resembles the court houses of some of the newest counties. After that comes a group of company cottages tacked under the wing of a lofty hill. Lawns stretch in front of them, while brilliant blossoms peep over the tops of flower pots swung from the eaves of the porches. Then the car proceeds through a long avenue of cottonwoods and poplars to the stations near the Hotel Margaret.

The Traveling Library.

If Mr. Ross is with the visitor, the latter already will have been prepared for the first of a series of striking features. On a railroad track between the hotel and the sawmill stands the

the hotel and the sawmill stands the library car. He points it out with a degree of pride, remarking, "The only one in the country." And that serves to introduce its story, with full credit given Miss Ruth Worden, the county librarian, as the originator of the idea.

"Perhaps I'm telling something she oughtn't know," he proceeds, "but the truth is that I didn't think much of it at first. She came out here from Missoula with a case of books, and asked if she might put them in circulation. I was pretty busy. Sometimes a man gives mighty scant attention to things he considers unimportant until they turn out to be pretty big. As I say, I didn't think much of it or about it, but I said yes. And then we had to hire a girl to look after the books. The first thing I knew the whole town seemed to be interested. The fact was impressed on me when some of the men in the office came to me and proposed that they take the matter of the local librarian's pay off my hands. They would give a dance, they said, to raise the money for her salary. They did, and it was a big dance, too.

"Then things went along until one day I got a report that the people of this little place had read during the year no less than 11,500 books. That made me take notice. And the next thing I heard was that one of the men at the bunkhouse had been reading up on industry and economics, and got out of one of the books an argument that shut up one of these fellows that always seems to think it is a crime to give a day's work for a day's pay. This fellow thought the men ought to slack up, lay down on the job. But the man who had been reading said if everybody did that there would be nothing to take away from the capitalists, much less to divide, whereas if both sides played fair there would be plenty to go around. That settled it. The fellow who had been suggesting slacking up found the company too cold and left.

"That also made me take notice. I was interested by that time, and when Miss Worden, who is the sister of the governor's wife, came along with another idea, I gave it immediate attention. This time she only wanted to devise some means to get books to the lumberjacks up at the Nine Mile. So now we've got that library car. It is just one of the bunk cars of the traveling camps used in the timber regions, but instead of having bunks, it is lined with bookshelves, and we hook it on the log trains at intervals so the men up in the woods can have the latest reading matter."

An Extraordinary Store.

Fronting the hotel there is an area of an acre or two which was once a park, but which was transformed during the war into a vegetable garden. It is not the famous community garden, which is always reserved as the climactic exhibit, but the plot from which is produced the green foodstuffs for the commissaries supplying the hundreds of lumberjacks quartered on the wooded heights of the Bitter Roots.

Opposite this is the structure housing the general offices and the community store. If Mr. Ross could

assemble a model town conference at Bonner and have among the delegates Nikolai Lenine, the Bolshevik premier, that distinguished philosopher and friend of the people probably would at once pounce on the store as outstanding evidence of a deep-laid plot to exploit the proletariat. But a few moments of conversation with Charles Hart, the storekeeper, not only would serve to convince him that he had leaped to an erroneous conclusion, but that in Bonner, particularly as regards the company store, co-operation was practiced long before the Russian revolution occurred.

From any one of a dozen women patrons he would receive, first hand, the information that when sugar went aviating in 1917 the Bonner store continued, while the supply lasted, to sell it at the pre-war price. From them he also would hear that Mr. Hart was appointed in charge of the community garden, an institution whose prolific production materially reduces the store's revenues. His complete bewilderment would be effected by Mr. Hart's own statement that Mr. Ross will not permit the store to make a profit.

"When I go in and tell him the store is the only department in the whole outfit that doesn't show a profit," Mr. Hart explains ruefully, "he tells me it is no part of the company's policy to make a cent off the food its employees eat. We are allowed only to pay the expenses of being a convenience. What is left over goes back to the patrons."

From the offices it is but a few steps to the mill, a gigantic structure of concrete, steel and wood, reared on the banks of the Blackfoot river. Into this the huge logs are drawn to be transformed into all sorts of mouldings and wall trimmings for expensive dwellings. The latter, of course, do not go into mines, but are prepared for the commercial market. J.F. Mair, the plant superintendent, usually takes the visitor in charge for a tour of the mill, and he sees to it that nothing is missed. Mair is one of the old-timers. Only Clifford LaForge, the chief engineer, and Fred Thibodeaux, a trimmerman, have been at Bonner longer than he. They have been in service there for periods ranging from 35 to 40 years. All three came from the same section of the country, the Maine woods, or the timber region of New Brunswick. Mr. Ross himself is a native of Nova Scotia.

A Model Bachelor's Hall.

Past a huge log jam, constantly replenished by fresh timber arrivals from the Nine Mile, the visitor is next headed for the bachelor quarters of Bonner, a great, rambling, two-story structure standing at the upper end of the yards, beyond the shops and an assemblage of spare timber camp equipment. Next to the sawmill itself and the community garden, this apparently stands highest in the estimation of Mr. Ross. Here 200 or 300 unmarried men live with all the comforts afforded by a modern hotel.

Every sleeping room is an outside room. There are verandas on all four sides; bathrooms equipped with tubs and showers are on each floor, and each floor also has its assembly room, one of which is used occasionally for dances and other gatherings.

A custodian with a corps of orderlies has charge of sleeping-room equipment, which is said to have cost in the neighborhood of $100,000. The mill went on a two-shift basis June 10, and the day men have one floor, while the night crew has the other, so that they do not disturb each other as they come and go.

84 Familes Gardening.

Next comes what the entire population of Bonner regards as the finest thing possessed by any community, large or small, in the United States – its community garden. Started as a war activity, it has been continued because it has engaged even more serious attention in peace time than it did during the period of hostilities. Its fame has spread throughout the country, and Mr. Ross receives, from time to time, many letters from industrial centers, asking for information.

It occupies 11 acres of ground, lying just across the road from the big dormitory, but is exclusively the property of the married folk of the community. At this time of year it is at its best. On the day the sawmill went on a two-shift schedule a large party visited it, and had the fortune to fall in with Mrs. S.J. Daggett, wife of one of the mill sawyers, who volunteered as a guide.

In a neat little gingham gown, and wearing a broad-brimmed garden hat and loosely-fitting gloves, Mrs. Daggett looked just what she was, an enthusiastic gardener, and one of the women told her so.

"How could I be anything else," she demanded briskly, as she shifted the nozzle of her garden hose from one hand to the other, and continued carefully to guide a stream of water along the rows of sprouting vegetables. "My little garden saved me something like $300 last year and gave my family and me unlimited satisfaction. I can't begin to tell you of the pleasure and health we all derived from it. Just look about. With all these facilities simply handed to us, you might say, how can one help being interested in gardening?"

It was early in the morning, but already several women as zealous as Mrs. Daggett were busily weeding and watering their garden plots, which were showing fresh and green in the sunlight. It was an attractive and thrifty scene.

"Tell us about it," one of the group demanded. "How did the community garden start and who first thought of it?"

Mrs. Daggett laid down her garden hose and shut off the water supply. "I can't talk and work too," she explained briefly, "and when I commence to talk about these gardens no one can tell when I will stop. Let's walk along and look at them, and I will tell you about them as we go. They

were started during the war as a measure of economy, and have been continued ever since. It was Mr. Hart, manager of the company store here, who first thought of them. We call him the father of the gardens, and he has charge of them.

"The company donated the use of the ground, and installed the water supply; you see there is water for every plot. Each year they fertilize, plow and harrow the ground. There are 73 plots in the gardens, each 33 feet wide and 80 feet long. All we have to do is buy our seed and plant and care for our gardens. Mr. Hart insists that we take care of them too. He simply will not stand for neglect or weeds, and he is right."

"Then 73 families have gardens?" an attentive listener asked.

"It would usually mean that," replied Mrs. Daggett, "but this year there are 84 families engaged in the gardening, because nine plots were divided in half by those who wanted only small gardens."

Captured Prizes at Fair.

"There must be keen rivalry among the gardeners," someone observed.

"There is," agreed Mrs. Daggett. "Mr. Hart offers prizes every year and everyone competes for them. That keeps up interest. I wish you could be here a month or six weeks from now, and see how beautiful this place will be. My mother, who lives in Iowa, spent last summer with me. She was 84 years old, and she said in her long life she had never seen such gardens.

"Two years ago many of us sent our best vegetables to the state fair at Helena, and we captured several premiums. I won second prize with my potatoes. They were extremely large, 60 of them weighing 100 pounds, and as sound as they could be. We all turned our prize money over to the town library. We just went into it for the honor and the glory, and we were a proud bunch."

The party strolled leisurely from one plot to another. Although it was early June and the season was early, one had a clear vision of the good things to come. Long rows of sweet corn were already growing lustily, while peas, beans and lettuce all gave promise of luscious treats to appear upon the family tables in the not far distant future. In fact, almost every member of the vegetable kingdom was represented in one garden or another, and many of the more artistically inclined gardeners had planted flowers to brighten and beautify the scene.

"You know," cautioned Mrs. Daggett, "these are by no means the only gardens in Bonner planted for the A.C.M. employees. The company owns a large garden down the street. Until the war, the site was used for a park, then it was turned into a vegetable garden for the benefit of the men employed in the lumber camp. The company hires an expert gardener, and he is busy throughout the season from morning until night. He raises some wonderful things. The garden supplies the camps with fresh vegetables all

through the summer, and they say the lumberjacks up at the Nine Mile already are talking about the sweet corn and can scarcely wait for it to grow."

The figure of a tall man in overalls appeared in the path. "Here is the gardener now!" exclaimed Mrs. Daggett. "I must ask him how he grew his lettuce last year; it was remarkable."

There followed a long and involved discussion upon the cultivation of that choice salad material, quite too complicated for mere amateur gardeners, and Mrs. Daggett inquired about the prospective supply of corn and other delectable green things destined to delight the lumbermen this season.

"It looks as though there will be plenty for them," the gardener assured her. "And that means something, too, for you just ought to see what these fellows eat. When the corn first ripens I can't seem to send up enough. Better have a look at my garden before you go," he added, as he hurried along the path. When, later on, his invitation was accepted, he had gone to luncheon, but the women lingered long among his wonderful vegetable beds, and almost found it in their hearts to wish they were members of the logging crew at the Nine Mile.

What One Woman Did.

Mrs. Daggett led the way back to her own plot, which drew her like a magnet. "He can grow fine lettuce, but so can I," she said, glancing toward the vanishing figure. "See this little plot here. I don't think it's more than 10 feet square. Well, last year there were five adults in our family, and though we ate all the lettuce we could, and I gave loads of it away I could not make an impression upon what we grew here; so at last in desperation I found a market for it in Missoula, and cleared more than $20 from that little patch."

"Did you can anything for the winter?" a thrifty housewife asked.

"Well, I should say I did!" exclaimed Mrs. Daggett, her face alight from the memory of her treasure. "I canned 75 quarts of beans, 20 quarts of peas, 40 quarts of corn, 25 gallons of pickles, 22 gallons of sauer kraut, besides a lot of beets, rhubarb, tomatoes and so on. I have more than enough canned stuff to last until the new crop comes; and winter vegetables, too, such as potatoes, turnips, cabbage, beets and onions. And there were plenty of other gardens as good as mine, if not better. You have no idea how much this means to all of us. And you know all this doesn't help the company store any. Before we had the gardens we bought everything from the store. I call it a pretty good company that looks out for its people like that.

The housewife agreed, and at parting, assured her that she would return with the ripening of the corn.

"Come along, I'll give you all you can eat," Mrs. Daggett promised recklessly, "and I'll just bet you can't beat my mother at eating it, either, even if she is 84 years old!"

Lumberjacks Return to the Blackfoot

AFTER TEN YEARS' ABSENCE, 500 WOODSMEN ARE AGAIN TOPPLING THE FOREST GIANTS ON A-C-M TIMBERLANDS

The Sunday Missoulian, Jan. 16, 1927

By John K. Hutchens

TIM-BER!"

The big trees are toppling again in the Blackfoot camps of Anaconda Copper Mining company, after its 10 year's respite from logging activites in this region. For it was in 1916 that the camps picked up their baggage and moved from Camas Prairie, near the town of Potomac, to the arboreal harvests along the Nine Mile, 30 miles west of Missoula.

Now they are back -- not in the same place, of course, but farther up the Blackfoot in the Sunset district, and once again the fir, larch and pine logs are slipping down the chutes to the railroad and the river. On May 15 the season officially reached its end at Nine Mile, but the huge task of moving the equipment of five camps started on May 1. A systematic, beautifully accomplished job it was, but not an easy one.

Thirty-one bunkhouses were loaded onto as many cars and shipped over the Northern Pacific tracks to Bonner, and thence to Sunset on the Milwaukee's Blackfoot branch. Twenty-five other portable houses took the same route, besides one can only guess what other innumerable equipment. And before those rolling houses penetrated the woods to their present resting place it was necessary that they find a ballasted steel road before them of some 12 miles.

Overcoming Obstacles.

A big job, and a human one. You think of men who work in the woods as being of a sort who find many obstacles, and who solve them in the quickest, most efficient way. Early this spring the places where the the A.C.M.'s five camps now rest were quiet and peaceful. Now there are 17,000,000 feet of timber "decked" in the woods and on the river. There will be many million more when the big river drive opens around June 1, and for possibly four Junes thereafter.

Pure machinery accomplished much. But the alert and skillful men who have charge of it have accomplished more. Before the machinery ever saw the woods, the practiced eye of the lumber expert caught its possibilities. Up

went55 a headquarters, a machine shop, a coal dock, oil houses, carpenter and harness shops, a mess hall, a water works and dwelling houses. On October 1 the company was ready for its men.

They came. Or rather, they came back – for more than 40 per cent of the woods army are veterans who find their winter home in the forest, and have done so – many of them for periods running from 10 to 40 years. The sawyers, the teamsters, the "chute monkeys," the swampers, the canthook men – and on up the line to the camp foreman, or "straw boss," and to Don MacKenzie, the superintendent in immediate charge of all of the five camps now in operation.

It's not a noisy business, logging and lumbering. There is a foot of snow in the woods right now, and your impressions as you go from one camp to another is of men who walk quietly, talk little, and accomplish much. Even the logs slip quietly down the greased and sanded chutes in which the company has invested $40,000 for this season alone. In the spring they will be taken up, and the wood-pegged timbers sawed into boards. New chutes will be located in other sections of the Blackfoot stand.

"Just like that ... " the whole business seems to say to you in a deceptively off-hand manner. But you know at the same time that there are brains, energy and eternal foresight behind it all.

Old and New Timers.

This woods army: Its members form an odd melange of old and new timers. The old ones, it is said, are inclined to deprecate a little the worth of the new ones. Gone are the days, they say, of the gaudy lumberjack trousers, the gay sashes, the distinguishing mackinaws. Gone, they also charge, the pride of work which encouraged one man to see how much he could accomplish merely in order to outdo his fellow. But the new ones learn much from the old ones, besides what they can pick up for themselves. And if some of the traditional "glory" has departed from the profession of the lumberjack, it must be admitted that most of the bitter hardship of the profession has gone with it.

For men now live in groups of 16 in a single bunkhouse, large, comfortable, equipped with electricity and water; and this is true no matter how far into the woods the camp may be. Each day the mail comes in from headquarters, for the company brought in its wake a post office. But by far the most impressive item of the day to the visitor – more stirring than the crashing of the mightiest tree on a hillside – is: food.

Food!

It is almost inconceivable. One sees from 50 to 100 men sitting silently about a table at breakfast or at supper (the noon meal is served in the woods), and there seems to be enough on the

table for five times as many. Sausage, ham, hot cakes, fried potatoes, cookies, cakes, corn flakes, oatmeal, milk, coffee, doughnuts – that's breakfast! The same "items," with the exception of the cereal and the hot cakes, are likely to be on the table at lunch and supper time, with such additions as pork, corn beef and cabbage, baked beans, tea, pie and pudding.

It appears to be a bewildering array, but it is worked out to fractions of pounds and calories, according to the tables maintained by McEwan, general camp manager. In winter, it is figured correctly, a man working in the woods needs rich food. Very well. Each man, during the month of November, received an average of 1.5859 pounds of meat and fish during the day; .3709 pounds of canned, dried and fresh fruit; 1.9965 pounds of fresh vegetables. These figures are based upon the 46,700 meals served during the month of November in all camps. Some groups differ, of course. But in each camp the ease with which meals are served, and their unvarying excellence are enough to put the most skilled housewife to amazement.

At headquarters camp, for example, is Joe Kingman, who bears the appropriate sobriquet of the "Paul Bunyan of camp cooks," a past master in the devising of comestible menus, whose good natured and certain judgment have been listed among the company's assets for 20 years. And quantity! At camp 6, where there are about 100 men employed, there are baked each day 22 loaves of bread, each of a weight of one and one-half pounds; nine dozen buns; 20 dozen cookies; three squares of cake, each measuring 21 inches in length and width.

And, too, each of the five camps and headquarters raises its own pork, in the form of about 200 pigs that are so fat as to be almost rolling stock. They are mostly little ones now, but will grow soon to the handsome size of their parents before they are slaughtered. At Nine Mile last year 40,000 pounds of pork were provided by this important department of the commissary service.

For all this the monthly overhead is of course enormous – food during November cost $17,323 – but it is obvious that it must pay, as do other comforts which sometimes appear to be almost luxuries.

Once upon a time it was considered by a lumberjack that a trip to the nearest city (in this case, Missoula) was a treat. But to add the balanced life now led in the hills by these men, much of a city has been brought to them. From one camp to another circulates the library car, drawn by a puffing Shay engine, bearing the load of 1,500 books, and offering the subject of an unusually interesting study in the intellectual tastes of many men. Presided over by Jim Dwyer (who was present at the driving of the Northern Pacific's gold spike in '83), men come

of evenings and Sundays to read books which run from sets on electrical engineering to the lumberjack tales of Ralph Conner, from Bennett's Latin grammar to the detective stories of Frank Packard.

The liquor and after-dinner idleness of the old-time camp supplanted by literary interests? It's true, but it is only one of many improvements. In each camp are facilities for hot and cold showers; each has its own store, containing a stock worth about $1,000, where men may purchase goods at cost prices: tobacco, medicine, and equipment of many kinds.

Dining Outdoors.

The days start early in the woods, with the shortening shadows of 6:15 o'clock, and likewise end early when the electric lights turn off at 9 o'clock. When the sawyers are at work far back, the men must walk a proportionally longer distance to the field of operations. But in any event lunch is served at 11:30 o'clock, brought from the camp by wagon and horse, and served by the "mulligan mixer," or the "belly robber" –
that is to say, the cook.

It is a picturesque sight, this open-air meal. The axes still ring on the hillsides while the dishes are being set cafeteria style on a long table. (It may first have been necessary for the cook's assistant to sweep off the snow with his broom). Fires are built. And then men who have been working in the open air for four hours assist themselves to a meal the excellence of which is no whit less fine than those served in the long mess halls of the camps.

It is one of the satisfying features of the lumber industry, at least from the spectator's point of view, that you seem almost able to see the process from the start to the finish, from the time a giant tree topples in the forest until it is ready for the big mill at Bonner. In the same way it seems an anomaly that these trees should be whittled off the surface of the earth to be shot down to the 3,000-foot levels of the Butte mines.

"Elemental." The word keeps coming back to you as you see men wrestling with primeval forces and handling with amazing skill these basic materials. But it is extremely likely to be confused with an apparent ease. The answer is that neither the skilled nor unskilled work is hard or easy.

"How does a man begin out here in the woods?" was a question put to Don MacKenzie, foreman, who himself started from the bottom of the heap 17 years ago.

Don smiled as if to suggest that it depended entirely on the man.

A Place for Skill.

"He starts with a pick and shovel clearing roads. And if he is any good, why, he keeps on going." Don dropped into the lingo of the game, and suggested that a greenhorn might next become a "swamper," or a man who

trims the fallen tree before it is ready to hit the chutes. But before he can get to it, it must first have been tackled by the sawyers, skilled men who work in teams on contract or "gyppo" agreements. Then it is set for the "skinners," who will be driving horses or "cats" (caterpillar tractors), according to the nature of the country.

Perhaps, as in one gulch leading into camp No. 2, the "cat" may pull the log directly down to the track to be taken care of by the canthook men, or "stingers," whose deft hooks deck the logs that await the jammer. But it is more likely that either the horses or "cat" will take it to one of the long wooden chutes, which are composed of literally miles of logs ingeniously fitted together and scooped out. Again you find the deceptive case of this business!

The chutes look simple enough but they are figured out according to the slope of the land which will keep the logs moving at the safest possible speed. If you stand by the fire at which one of the "chute monkeys" is warming the sand for the steep places, you will hear, far above you, the sound of half a dozen logs hitting against another with a dull bump and carrying it down before them. On they come, a ghostly procession, sometimes at the pace of a running man, or again at a walk and accompanied either by horses or "cats." Occasionally there are accidents – a log is apt to jump a chute – but not very often.

"A lumberjack generally knows how to get out of the way of a log somehow," says the foreman. "He will steer it aside with his canthook, or he will jump over it, but not very often will he be hurt. Logs look far more vicious to the spectator than to the man who is actually in danger."

"Keeping It Moving."

Down the chutes, then to the railroad or the river. If to the former, the log is taken from its place atop the deck by a "Jammer," or derrick-like machine which is on a railroad car by itself. Then – down they go through the woods, very likely of their own weight, held back by brakes and by the little engine at the head of the train. They are averaging 20 carloads a day now over the Milwaukee road, shipped from camps No. 2 and 3 alone, for the three river camps are piling high their product ready for the high water of the spring.

Sounds simple, does it not? But it isn't entirely so. The main condition required for logging is plain. It is cold weather. Hard snow that keeps the trails open for the horses and the "cats" is a positive necessity; a "chinook" brings mud, and means that the horses will have to wallow in their effort to prevent production from reaching a standstill. "Keep it moving!" That's the cry that starts way back in the hills where the logs are cut, and continues to the very mill at Bonner.

An Elemental Business.

Fast advancing as the lumber business is, it still attracts men who have the frontiersman's love of conquering elemental difficulties. They need a bridge to span the Blackfoot river between camp No. 4 and that camp's field of active operation. It was built between May 15 and September 15 at a cost of $30,000 by 19 men under the surveillance of a foreman and an engineer. It is a magnificent structure. When the big body of the men came to work in October it was, like everything else, ready for them. And so, if there is one word more than another that seems to characterize the activities of the camps, it is foresight.

It is present at the creation of the railroad now heading east of the headquarters camp toward the Elk river country; for the present stand is good for no more than four years.It is to be seen in the fact that the men who work in the woods are fed royally, housed comfortably, and equipped with heavy clothing that does not permit of exposure. An elemental business has been humanized to the highest degree.

And the results are manifest in one conclusion that you must reach, after two days in the woods, to the effect that the men working silently through the snow-covered hills are co-workers in a noble and traditional profession and are therefore very much like the members of one family. Property is safe. ("We'd go to New York for a man, if we thought he'd stolen so much as a pair of sox," says Don MacKenzie); the time-honored formula of work and rest in equal parts is enforced; and entertainment in various forms is provided for. There are of course, many men who work a day for the price of enough gas to move on, and leave accordingly. There are many, many more, however, who work through the winter, and whose checks reach a Missoula bank each month unspent.

"We have men here who have saved over $6,000 without a break," it was stated at the headquarters camp.

Yes, there have been significant changes in the business since an earlier lumberman, A. B. Hammond, worked the banks of the Blackfoot in the '80s.

However, speaking literally, the woods are still full of good men.

❑ Norman Maclean

One of the "other stories" in Maclean's "A River Runs Through It and Other Stories" is this selection based on summers he spent in an Anaconda Company logging camp in 1927 and '28. They were the first years lumberjacks returned to the Blackfoot (see preceding selection). Of the three stories in the book, "Logging and Pimping and 'Your Pal, Jim'" is the only one yet to be put to film. "The Ranger, The Cook and a Hole in the Sky" was made into a television movie starring Sam Elliott in 1995.

Logging and Pimping and 'Your Pal, Jim'

The first time I took any real notice of him was on a Sunday afternoon in a bunkhouse in one of the Anaconda Company's logging camps on the Blackfoot River. He and I and some others had been lying on our bunks reading, although it was warm and half-dark in the bunkhouse this summer afternoon. The rest of them had been talking, but to me everything seemed quiet. As events proved in a few minutes, the talking had been about "The Company," and probably the reason I hadn't heard it was that the lumberjacks were registering their customary complaints about the Company – it owned them body and soul; it owned the state of Montana, the press, the preachers, etc.; the grub was lousy and likewise the wages, which the Company took right back from them anyway by overpricing everything at the commissary, and they had to buy from the commissary, out in the woods where else could they buy. It must have been something like this they were saying, because all of a sudden I heard him break the quiet: "Shut up, you incompetent sons of bitches. If it weren't for the Company, you'd all starve to death."

At first, I wasn't sure I had heard it or he had said it, but he had. Everything was really quiet now and everybody was watching his small face and big head and body behind an elbow on his bunk. After a while, there were stirrings and one by one the stirrings disappeared into the sunlight of the door. Not a stirring spoke, and this was a logging camp and they were big men.

Lying there on my bunk, I realized that actually this was not the first time I had noticed him. For instance, I already knew his name, which was Jim Grierson, and I knew he was a socialist who thought Eugene Debs was soft. Probably he hated the Company more than any man in camp, but the men he hated more than the Company. It was also clear I had noticed him before, because when I started to wonder how I would come out with him in a fight, I discovered I already had the answer. I estimated he weighed 185 to 190 pounds and so was at least 35 pounds heavier than I was,

but I figured I had been better taught and could reduce him to size if I could last the first ten minutes. I also figured that probably I could not last the first ten minutes.

I didn't go back to my reading but lay there looking for something interesting to think about, and was interested finally in realizing that I had estimated my chances with Jim in a fight even before I thought I had noticed him. Almost from the first moment I saw Jim I must have felt threatened, and others obviously felt the same way -- later as I came to know him better all my thinking about him was colored by the question, "Him or me?" He had just taken over the bunkhouse, except for me, and now he was tossing on his bunk to indicate his discomfort at my presence. I stuck it out for a while, just to establish homestead rights to existence, but now that I couldn't read anymore, the bunkhouse seemed hotter than ever, so, after carefully measuring the implications of my not being wanted, I got up and sauntered out the door as he rolled over and sighed.

By the end of the summer, when I had to go back to school, I knew a lot more about Jim, and in fact he and I had made a deal to be partners for the coming summer. It didn't take long to find out that he was the best lumberjack in camp. He was probably the best with the saw and ax, and he worked with a kind of speed that was part ferocity. This was back in 1927, as I remember, and of course there was no such thing as a chain saw then, just as now there is no such thing as a logging camp or a bunkhouse the whole length of the Blackfoot River, although there is still a lot of logging going on there. Now the saws are one-man chain saws run by light high-speed motors, and the sawyers are married and live with their families, some of them as far away as Missoula, and drive more than a hundred miles a day to get to and from work. But in the days of the logging camps, the men worked mostly on two-man crosscut saws that were things of beauty, and the highest paid man in camp was the man who delicately filed and set them. The two-man teams who pulled the saws either worked for wages or "gyppoed." To gyppo, which wasn't meant to be a nice-sounding word and could be used as either a noun or a verb, was to be paid by the number of thousands of board feet you cut a day. Naturally, you chose to gyppo only if you thought you could beat wages and the men who worked for wages. As I said, Jim had talked me into being his partner for next summer, and we were going to gyppo and make big money. You can bet I agreed to this with some misgivings, but I was in graduate school now and on my own financially and needed the big money. Besides, I supposed I was flattered by being asked to be the partner of the best sawyer

in camp. It was a long way, though, from being all flattery. I also knew I was being challenged. This was the world of the woods and the working stiff, the logging camp being a world especially overbearing with challenges, and, if you expected to duck all challenges, you shouldn't have wandered into the woods in the first place. It is true, too, that up to a point I liked being around him – he was three years older than I was, which at times is a lot, and he had seen parts of life with which I, as the son of a Presbyterian minister, wasn't exactly intimate.

A couple of other things cropped up about him that summer that had a bearing on the next summer when he and I were to gyppo together. He told me he was Scotch, which figured, and that made two of us. He said that he had been brought up in the Dakotas and that his father (and I quote) was "a Scotch son of a bitch" who threw him out of the house when he was fourteen and he had been making his own living ever since. He explained to me that he made his living only partly by working. He worked just in the summer, and then this cultural side of him, as it were, took over. He holed up for the winter in some town that had a good Carnegie Public Library and the first thing he did was take out a library card. Then he went looking for a good whore, and so he spent the winter reading and pimping – or maybe this is stated in reverse order. He said that on the whole he preferred southern whores; southern whores, he said, were generally "more poetical," and later I think I came to know what he meant by this.

So I started graduate school that autumn, and it was tough and not made any easier by the thought of spending all next summer on the end of a saw opposite this direct descendant of a Scotch son of a bitch.

But finally it was late June and there he was, sitting on a log across from me and looking as near like a million dollars as a lumberjack can look. He was dressed all in wool – in a rich Black Watch plaid shirt, gray, short-legged stag pants, and a beautiful new pair of logging boots with an inch or so of white sock showing at the top. The lumberjack and the cowboy followed many of the same basic economic and ecological patterns. They achieved a balance if they were broke at the end of the year. If they were lucky and hadn't been sick or anything like that, they had made enough to get drunk three or four times and to buy their clothes. Their clothes were very expensive; they claimed they were robbed up and down the line and probably they were, but clothes that would stand their work and the weather had to be something special. Central to both the lumberjack's and the cowboy's outfit were the boots, which took several months of savings.

The pair that Jim had on were White Loggers made, as I remember, by a

company in Spokane that kept your name and measurements. It was a great shoe, but there were others and they were great, too – they had to be. The Bass, the Bergman, and the Chippewa were all made in different parts of the country, but in the Northwest most of the jacks I remember wore the Spokane shoe.

As the cowboy boot was made all ways for riding horses and working steers, the logger's boot was made for working on and around logs. Jim's pair had a six-inch top, but there were models with much higher tops – Jim happened to belong to the school that wanted their ankles supported but no tie on their legs. The toe was capless and made soft and somewhat waterproof with neat's-foot oil. The shoe was shaped to walk or "ride" logs. It had a high instep to fit the log, and with a high instep went a high heel, not nearly so high as a cowboy's and much sturdier because these were walking shoes; in fact, very fine walking shoes – the somewhat high heel threw you slightly forward of your normal stance and made you feel you were being helped ahead. Actually, this feeling was their trademark.

Jim was sitting with his right leg rocking on his left knee, and he gestured a good deal with his foot, raking the log I was sitting on for emphasis and leaving behind a gash in its side. The soles of these loggers' boots looked like World War I, with trenches and barbwire highly planned – everything planned, in this case, for riding logs and walking. Central to the grand design were the caulks, or "corks" as the jacks called them; they were long and sharp enough to hold to a heavily barked log or, tougher still, to one that was dead and had no bark on it. But of course caulks would have ripped out at the edges of a shoe and made you stumble and trip at the toes, so the design started with a row of blunt, sturdy hobnails around the edges and maybe four or five rows of them at the toes. Then inside came the battlefield of caulks, the real barbwire, with two rows of caulks coming down each side of the sole and one row on each side continuing into the instep to hold you when you jumped crosswise on a log. Actually, it was a beautiful if somewhat primitive design and had many uses – for instance, when a couple of jacks got into a fight and one went down the other was almost sure to kick and rake him with his boots. This treatment was known as "giving him the leather: and, when a jack got this treatment, he was out of business for a long time and was never very pretty again.

Every time Jim kicked and raked the log beside me for emphasis I wiped small pieces of bark off my face.

In this brief interlude in our relations it seemed to me that his face had grown a great deal since I first knew him last year. From last year I remembered big frame, big head, small face, tight like a fist; I even wondered at times if it wasn't his best

punch. But sitting here relaxed and telling me about pimping and spraying bark on my face, he looked all big, his nose too and eyes, and he looked handsome and clearly he liked pimping – at least for four or five months of the year – and he especially liked being bouncer in his own establishment, but even that, he said, got boring. It was good to be out in the woods again, he said, and it was good to see me – he also said that; and it was good to be back to work – he said that several times.

Most of this took place in the first three or four days. We started in easy, each one admitting to the other that he was soft from the winter, and, besides, Jim hadn't finished giving me this course on pimping. Pimping is a little more complicated than the innocent bystander might think. Besides selecting a whore (big as well as southern, i.e., "poetical") and keeping her happy (taking her to the Bijou Theater in the afternoons) and hustling (rounding up all the Swedes and Finns and French Canadians you had known in the woods), you also had to be your own bootlegger (it still being Prohibition) and your own police fixer (it being then as always) and your own bouncer (which introduced a kind of sporting element into the game). But after a few days of resting every hour we had pretty well covered the subject, and still nobody seemed interested in bringing up socialism.

I suppose that an early stage in coming to hate someone is just running out of things to talk about. I thought then it didn't make a damn bit of difference to me that he liked his whores big as well as southern. Besides, we were getting in shape a little. We started skipping the rest periods and took only half an hour at lunch and at lunch we sharpened our axes on our Carborundum stones. Slowly we became silent, and silence itself is an enemy to friendship; when we came back to camp each went his own way, and within a week we weren't speaking to each other. Well, this in itself needn't have been ominous. Lots of teams of sawyers work in silence because that is pretty much the kind of guys they are and of course because no one can talk and at the same time turn out thousands of board feet. Some teams of sawyers even hate each other and yet work together year after year, something like the old New York Celtic basketball team, knowing the other guy's moves without troubling to look. But our silence was different. It didn't have much to do with efficiency and big production. When he broke the silence to ask me if I would like to change from a six- to a seven-foot saw, I knew I was sawing for survival. A six-foot blade was plenty long enough for the stuff we were sawing, and the extra foot would have been only that much more for me to pull.

It was getting hot and I was half-sick when I came back to camp at the end of the day. I would dig into my duffel bag and get clean underwear and clean white

socks and a bar of soap and go to the creek. Afterwards, I would sit on the bank until I was dry. Then I would feel better. It was a rule I had learned my first year working in the Forest Service – when exhausted and feeling sorry for yourself, at least change socks. On weekends I spent a lot of time washing my clothes. I washed them carefully and I expected them to be white, not gray, when they had dried on the brush. At first, then, I relied on small, home remedies such as cleanliness.

I had a period, too, when I leaned on proverbs, and tried to pass the blame back on myself, with some justification. All winter I had had a fair notion that something like this would happen. Now I would try to be philosophical by saying to myself, "Well, pal, if you fool around with the bull, you have to expect the horn."

But, when you are gored, there is not much comfort in proverbs.

Gradually, though, I began to fade out of my own picture of myself and what was happening and it was he who controlled my thoughts. In these dreams, some of which I had during the day, I was always pulling a saw and he was always at the other end of it getting bigger and bigger but his face getting smaller and smaller – and closer – until finally it must have come through the cut in the log, and with no log between us now, it threatened to continue on down the saw until it ran into me. It sometimes came close enough so that I could see how it got smaller – by twisting and contracting itself around its nose – and somewhere along here in my dream I would wake up from the exertion of trying to back away from what I was dreaming about.

In a later stage of my exhaustion, there was no dream – or sleep – just a constant awareness of being thirsty and of a succession of events of such a low biological order that normally they escaped notice. All night sighs succeeded grunts and grumblings of the guts, and about an hour after everyone was in bed and presumably asleep there were attempts at homosexuality, usually unsuccessful if the statistics I started to keep were at all representative. The bunkhouse would become almost silent. Suddenly somebody would jump up in his bed, punch another somebody, and mutter, "You filthy son of a bitch." Then he would punch him four or five times more, fast, hard punches. The other somebody never punched back. Instead, trying to be silent, his grieved footsteps returned to bed. It was still early in the night, too early to start thinking about daybreak. You lay there quietly through the hours, feeling as if you had spent all the previous day drinking out of a galvanized pail – eventually, every thought of water tasted galvanized.

After two or three nights of this you came to know you could not be whipped. Probably you could not win, but you could not be whipped.

I'll try not to get technical about logging, but I have to give you some idea of daylight reality and some notion of what was going on in the woods while I was trying

to stay alive. Jim's pace was set to kill me off – it would kill him eventually too, but first me. So the problem, broadly speaking, was how to throw him off this pace and not quite get caught doing it, because after working a week with this Jack Dempsey at the other end of the saw I knew I'd never have a chance if he took a punch at me. Yet I would have taken a punching from him before I would ever have asked him to go easier on the saw. You were no logger if you didn't feel this way. The world of the woods and the working stiff was pretty much made of three things – working, fighting, and dames – and the complete lumberjack had to be handy at all of them. But if it came to the bitter choice, he could not remain a logger and be outworked. If I had ever asked for mercy on the saw I might as well have packed my duffel bag and started down the road.

So I tried to throw Jim off pace even before we began a cut. Often, before beginning to saw, sawyers have to do a certain amount of "brushing out," which means taking an ax and chopping bushes or small jack pines that would interfere with the sawing. I guess that by nature I did more of this than Jim, and now I did as much of it as I dared, and it burned hell out of him, especially since he had yelled at me about it early in the season when we were still speaking to each other. "Jesus," he had said, "you're no gyppo. Any time a guy's not sawing he's not making money. Nobody out here is paying you for trimming a garden." He would walk up to a cut and if there was a small jack pine in the way he would bend it over and hold it with his foot while he sawed and he ripped through the huckleberry bushes. He didn't give a damn if the bushes clogged his saw. He just pulled harder.

As to the big thing, sawing, it is something beautiful when you are working rhythmically together – at times, you forget what you are doing and get lost in abstractions of motion and power. But when sawing isn't rhythmical, even for a short time, it becomes a kind of mental illness – maybe even something more deeply disturbing than that. It is as if your heart isn't working right. Jim, of course, had thrown us off basic rhythm when he started to saw me into the ground by making the stroke too fast and too long, even for himself. Most of the time I followed his stroke; I had to, but I would pick periods when I would not pull the saw to me at quite the speed or distance he was pulling it back to him. Just staying slightly off beat, not being quite so noticeable that he could yell but still letting him know what I was doing. To make sure he knew, I would suddenly go back to his stroke.

I'll mention just one more trick I invented with the hope of weakening Jim by frequent losses of adrenalin. Sawyers have many little but nevertheless almost sacred rules of work in order to function as a team, and every now and then I would almost

break one of these but not quite. For instance, if you are making a cut in a fallen tree and it binds, or pinches, and you need a wedge to open the cut and free your saw and the wedge is on Jim's side of the log, then you are not supposed to reach over the log and get the wedge and do the job. Among sawyers, no time is wasted doing Alphonse-Gaston acts; what is on your side is your job – that's the rule. But every now and then I would reach over for his wedge, and when our noses almost bumped, we would freeze and glare. It was like a closeup in an early movie. Finally, I'd look somewhere else as if of all things I had never thought of the wedge, and you can be sure that, though I reached for it, I never got to it first and touched it.

Most of the time I took a lot of comfort from the feeling that some of this was getting to him. Admittedly, there were times when I wondered if I weren't making up a good part of this feeling just to comfort myself, but even then I kept doing things that in my mind were hostile acts. The other lumberjacks, though, helped to make me feel that I was real. They all acknowledged I was in a big fight, and quietly they encouraged me, probably with the hope they wouldn't have to take him on themselves. One of them muttered to me as we started out in the morning, "Some day that son of a bitch go out in the woods, he no come back." By which I assumed he meant I was to drop a tree on him and forget to yell, "Timber!" Actually, though, I had already thought of this.

Another good objective sign was that he got in a big argument with the head cook, demanding pie for breakfast. It sounds crazy, for anybody who knows anything knows that the head cook runs the logging camp. He is, as the jacks say, "the guy with the golden testicles." If he doesn't like a jack because the jack has the bad table manners to talk at meal time, the cook goes to the woods foreman and the jack goes down the road. Just the same, Jim got all the men behind him and then put up his big argument and nobody went down the road and we had pie every morning for breakfast – two or three kinds – and nobody ever ate a piece, nobody, including Jim.

Oddly, after Jim won this pie fight with the cook, things got a little better for me in the woods. We still didn't speak to each other, but we did start sawing in rhythm.

Then, one Sunday afternoon this woman rode into camp, and stopped to talk with the woods foreman and his wife. She was a big woman on a big horse and carried a pail. Nearly every one in camp knew her or of her – she was the wife of a rancher who owned one of the finest ranches in the valley. I had only met her but my family knew her family quite well, my father occasionally coming up the valley to preach to the especially congregated Presbyterians. Anyway, I thought I had better go over and speak to her and maybe do my father's cause some good, but it was a mistake. She was still sitting on her big horse and I had talked to her for just a couple

of minutes, when who shows up but Jim and without looking at me says he is my partner and "pal" and asks her about the pail. The woods foreman takes all our parts in reply. First, he answers for her and says she is out to pick huckleberries, and then he speaks as foreman and tells her we are sawyers and know the woods well, and then he replies to himself and speaks for us and assures her that Jim would be glad to show her where the huckleberries are, and it's a cinch he was. In the camp, the men were making verbal bets where nothing changes hands that Jim laid her within two hours. One of the jacks said, "He's as fast with dames as with logs." By late afternoon she rode back into camp. She never stopped. She was hurried and at a distance looked white and didn't have any huckleberries. She didn't even have her empty pail. Who the hell knows what she told her husband?

At first I felt kind of sorry for her because she was so well known in camp and was so much talked about, but she was riding "High, Wide, and Handsome." She was back in camp every Sunday. She always came with a gallon pail and she always left without it. She kept coming long after huckleberry season passed. There wasn't a berry left on a bush, but she came with another big pail.

The pie fight with the cook and the empty huckleberry pail were just what I needed psychologically to last until Labor Day weekend, when, long ago, I had told both Jim and the foreman I was quitting in order to get ready for school. There was no great transformation in either Jim or me. Jim was still about the size of Jack Dempsey. Nothing had happened to reduce this combination of power and speed. It was just that something had happened so that most of the time now we sawed to saw logs. As for me, for the first (and only) time in my life I had spent over a month twenty-four hours a day doing nothing but hating a guy. Now, though, there were times when I thought of other things – it got so that I had to say to myself, "Don't ever get soft and forget to hate this guy for trying to kill you off." It was somewhere along in here, too, when I became confident enough to develop the theory that he wouldn't take a punch at me. I probably was just getting wise to the fact that he ran this camp as if he were the best fighter in it without ever getting into a fight. He had us stiffs intimidated because he made us look bad when it came to work and women, and so we went on to feel that we were also about to take a punching. Fortunately, I guess, I always realized this might be just theory, and I continued to act as if he were the best fighter in camp, as he probably was, but, you know, it still bothers me that maybe he wasn't.

When we quit work at night, though, we still walked to camp alone. He still went first, slipping on his Woolrich shirt over the top piece of his underwear and putting his empty lunch pail under his arm. Like all sawyers, we pulled off our shirts

first thing in the morning and worked all day in the tops of our underwear, and in the summer we still wore wool underwear, because we said sweat made cotton stick to us and wool absorbed it. After Jim disappeared for camp, I sat down on a log and waited for the sweat to dry. It still took me a while before I felt steady enough to reach for my Woolrich shirt and pick up my lunch pail and head for camp, but now I knew I could last until I had said I would quit, which sometimes can be a wonderful feeling.

One day toward the end of August he spoke out of the silence and said, "When are you going to quit?" It sounded as if someone had broken the silence before it was broken by Genesis.

I answered and fortunately I had an already-made answer; I said, "As I told you, the Labor Day weekend."

He said, "I may see you in town before you leave for the East. I'm going to quit early this year myself." Then he added, "Last spring I promised a dame I would." I and all the other jacks had already noticed that the rancher's wife hadn't shown up in camp last Sunday, whatever that meant.

The week before I was going to leave for school I ran into him on the main street. He was looking great – a little thin, but just a little. He took me into a speakeasy and bought me a drink of Canadian Club. Since Montana is a northern border state, during Prohibition there was a lot of Canadian whiskey in my town if you knew where and had the price. I bought the second round, and he bought another and said he had enough when I tried to do the same. Then he added, "You know, I have to take care of you." Even after three drinks in the afternoon, I was a little startled, and still am.

Outside, as we stood parting and squinting in the sunlight, he said, "I got a place already for this dame of mine, but we've not yet set up for business." Then he said very formally, "We would appreciate it very much if you would pay us a short visit before you leave town." And he gave me the address and, when I told him it would have to be soon, we made a date for the next evening.

The address he had given me was on the north side, which is just across the tracks, where most of the railroaders lived. When I was a kid, our town had what was called a red-light district on Front Street adjoining the city dump which was always burning with a fitting smell, but the law had more or less closed it up and scattered the girls around, a fair proportion of whom sprinkled themselves among the railroaders. When I finally found the exact address, I recognized the house next to it. It belonged to a brakeman who married a tramp and thought he was quite a fighter, although he never won many fights. He was more famous in town for the story that he came home

one night unexpectedly and captured a guy coming out. He reached in his pocket and pulled out three dollars. "Here," he told the guy, "go and get yourself a good screw."

Jim's place looked on the up-and-up – no shades drawn and the door slightly open and streaming light. Jim answered and was big enough to blot out most of the scenery, but I could see the edge of his dame just behind him. I remembered she was supposed to be southern and could see curls on her one visible shoulder. Jim was talking and never introduced us. Suddenly she swept around him, grabbed me by the hand, and said, "God bless your ol' pee hole; come on in and park your ol' prat on the piano."

Suddenly I think I understood what Jim had meant when he told me early in the summer that he liked his whores southern because they were "poetical." I took a quick look around the "parlor," and, sure enough, there was no piano, so it was pure poetry.

Later, when I found out her name, it was Annabelle, which fitted. After this exuberant outcry, she backed off in silence and sat down, it being evident, as she passed the light from a standing lamp, that she had no clothes on under her dress.

When I glanced around the parlor and did not see a piano I did, however, notice another woman and the motto of Scotland. The other woman looked older but not so old as she was supposed to be, because when she finally was introduced she was introduced as Annabelle's mother. Naturally, I wondered how she figured in Jim's operation and a few days later I ran into some jacks in town who knew her and said she was still a pretty good whore, although a little sad and flabby. Later that evening I tried talking to her; I don't think there was much left to her inside but it was clear she thought the world of Jim.

I had to take another look to believe it, but there it was on the wall just above the chair Jim was about to sit in – the motto of Scotland, and in Latin, too – *Nemo me impune lacesset*. Supposedly, only Jim would know what it meant. The whores wouldn't know and it's for sure his trade, who were Scandinavian and French-Canadian lumberjacks, wouldn't. So he sat on his leather throne, owner and chief bouncer of the establishment, believing only he knew that over his head it said: "No one will touch me with impunity."

But there was one exception. I knew what it meant, having been brought up under the same plaque, in fact an even tougher-looking version that had Scotch thistles engraved around the motto. My father had it hung in the front hall where it would be the first thing seen at all times by anyone entering the manse – and in the early mornings on her way to the kitchen by my mother who inherited the unmentioned infirmity of being part English.

Jim did most of the talking, and the rest of us listened and sometimes I just

watched. He sure as hell was a good-looking guy, and now he was all dressed up, conservatively in a dark gray herringbone suit and a blue or black tie. But no matter the clothes, he always looked like a lumberjack to me. Why not? He was the best logger I ever worked with, and I barely lived to say so.

Jim talked mostly about sawing and college. He and I had talked about almost nothing during the summer, least of all about college. Now, he asked me a lot of questions about college, but it just wasn't the case that they were asked out of envy or regret. He didn't look at me as a Scotch boy like himself, not so good with the ax and saw but luckier. He looked at himself, at least as he sat there that night, as a successful young businessman, and he certainly didn't think I was ever going to do anything that he wanted to do. What his being a socialist meant to him I was never to figure out. To me, he emerged as all laissez-faire. He was one of those people who turn out not to have some characteristic that you thought was a prominent one when you first met them. Maybe you only thought they had it because what you first saw or heard was at acute angle, or maybe they have it in some form but your personality makes it recessive. Anyway, he and I never talked politics (admitting that most of the time we never talked at all). I heard him talking socialism to the other jacks – yelling it at them would be more exact, as if they didn't know how to saw. Coming out the back door of the Dakotas in the twenties he had to be a dispossessed socialist of some sort, but his talk to me about graduate school was concerned mostly with the question of whether, if hypothetically he decided to take it on, he could reduce graduate study to sawdust, certainly a fundamental capitalistic question. His educational experiences in the Dakotas had had a lasting effect. He had gone as far as seventh grade and his teachers in the Dakotas had been big and tough and had licked him. What he was wondering was whether between seventh grade and graduate school the teachers kept pace with their students and could still lick him. I cheered him up a lot when I told him, "No, last winter wasn't as tough as this summer." He brought us all another drink of Canadian Club, and, while drinking this one, it occurred to me that maybe what he had been doing this summer was giving me his version of graduate school. If so, he wasn't far wrong.

Nearly all our talk, though, was about logging, because logging was what loggers talked about. They mixed it into everything. For instance, loggers celebrated the Fourth of July – the only sacred holiday in those times except Christmas – by contests in logrolling, sawing, and swinging the ax. Their work was their world, which included their games and their women, and the women at least had to talk like loggers, especially when they swore. Annabelle would occasionally come up with such a line as, "Somebody ought to drop the boom on that bastard," but when I started

fooling around to find out whether she knew what a boom was, she switched back to pure southern poetry. A whore has to swear like her working men and in addition she has to have pretty talk.

I was interested, too, in the way Jim pictured himself and me to his women – always as friendly working partners talking over some technical sawing problem. In his creations we engaged in such technical dialogue as this: "How much are you holding there? I'd ask; 'I'm holding two and a half inches.' " I can tell you that outside of the first few days of the summer we didn't engage in any such friendly talk, and any sawyer can tell you that the technical stuff he had us saying about sawing may sound impressive to whores but doesn't make any sense to sawyers and had to be invented by him. He was a great sawyer, and didn't need to make up anything, but it seemed as if every time he made us friends he had to make up lies about sawing to go with us.

I wanted to talk a little to the women before I left, but when I turned to Annabelle she almost finished me off before I got started by saying, "So you and I are partners of Jim?" Seeing that she had made such a big start with this, she was in another minute trying to persuade me she was Scotch, but I told her, "Try that on some Swede."

Her style was to be everything you wished she were except what you knew she wasn't. I didn't have to listen long before I was fairly sure she wasn't southern. Neither was the other one. They said "you all" and "ol' "and had curls and that was about it, all of which they probably did for Jim from the Dakotas. Every now and then Annabelle would become slightly hysterical, at least suddenly exuberant, and speak a line of something like "poetry" – an alliterative toast or rune or foreign expression. Then she would go back to her quiet game of trying to figure out something besides Scotch that she might persuade me she was that I would like but wouldn't know much about.

Earlier in the evening I realized that the two women were not mother and daughter or related in any way. Probably all three of them got strange pleasures from the notion they were a family. Both women, of course, dressed alike and had curls and did the southern bit, but fundamentally they were not alike in bone or body structure, except that they were both big women.

So all three of them created a warm family circle of lies.

The lumberjack in herringbone and his two big women in only dresses blocked the door as we said good-bye. "So long," I said from outside. "Au revoir," Annabelle said. "So long," Jim said, and then he added, "I'll be writing you."

And he did, but not until late in autumn. By then probably all the Swedish and

Finnish loggers knew his north-side place and he had drawn out his card from the Missoula Public Library and was rereading Jack London, omitting the dog stories. Since my address on the envelope was exact, he must have called my home to get it. The envelope was large and square; the paper was small, ruled, and had glue on the top edge, so it was pulled off some writing pad. His handwriting was large but grew smaller at the end of each word.

I received three other letters from him before the school year was out. His letters were only a sentence or two long. The one- or two-sentence literary form, when used by a master, is designed not to pass on some slight matter but to put the world in a nutshell. Jim was my first acquaintance with a mastery of this form.

His letters always began, "Dear partner," and always ended, "Your pal, Jim."

You can be sure I ignored any shadow of suggestion that I work with him the coming summer, and he never openly made the suggestion. I had decided that I had only a part of my life to give to gyppoing and that I had already given generously. I went back to the United States Forest Service and fought fires, which to Jim was like declaring myself a charity case and taking the rest cure.

So naturally I didn't hear from him that summer – undoubtedly, he had some other sawyer at the end of the saw whom he was reducing to sawdust. But come autumn and there was a big square envelope with the big handwriting that grew smaller at the end of each word. Since it was early autumn, he couldn't have been set up in business yet. Probably he had just quit the woods and was in town still looking things over. It could be he hadn't even drawn a library card yet. Anyway, this was the letter:

Dear partner,

Just to let you know I have screwed a dame that weighs 300 lbs.

Your pal,
Jim

A good many years have passed since I received that letter, and I have never heard from or about Jim since. Maybe at three hundred pounds the son of a bitch was finally overpowered.