

A Night Mare in a Logging Camp

A Sizzling Experience

The Bonner Hooligan

As the 1940's draws to a close, we see Harry S. Truman as the Thirty Third President of the United States and most new cars of the early 1950s have evolved from the Box Look with buggy style fenders to a square block of slightly melted chocolate, I find myself living in a quaint little A.C.M. Company Town in western Montana, named after Edward L. Bonner, and the huge Bonner Sawmill, dominates the majority of this landscape. Rows of immaculate homes landscaped with beautiful decorator trees and green lawns, transforms this setting into a magical wonderland. This setting was further enhanced by two Quaint little churches, a large gray school house and a well kept Base Ball Field with a covered spectator stand. For this young Hooligan it was mind blowing slice of heaven to say the least.

In the 1950's I found myself living in a Milwaukee Railroad house with actual indoor plumbing. I soon became acquainted with many of the folks who lived here and became fascinated with the stories they told about working in the lumber industry. Many of these great stories would influence my life today but there were some that rivaled the adventures of "Paul Bunyon", and would perhaps make old "Babe The Blue Ox" blush Pink.

The 1960's sort of snuck up on me and I now find myself working in this huge sawmill and 45 years later, I was called an "Old Timer". My life long memories were enhanced with a collection of timber related pictures, as well as many great memories and personal experiences. Champion International eventually purchased the Bonner Mill and they have asked me to become part of an Editorial Committee for their News Letter "The Tamarack". Eventually this working adventure would be one of my most enjoyable job related experiences. I was writing articles titled "The Early Days of Bonner". and some of my research was a little racy as well as humorous. I never included the racy stories in the news letter, but there was one such story I'll share, now that I'm retired.

The 1990's were upon us, when I received a phone call from a retired fellow employee who lived at Beaver Tail Hill. His father in law was the last engineer for Old #7 and he invited me to his home to share some incredible Logging Camp stories. As the evening wore on I discovered that each new story was more humorous than the last, and just when I thought that I simply could not laugh one more time he told me about night life in a Bunk House Car, mounted on rail road car wheels.

Sleeping bunks were placed side by side and the occupancy for each bunk was assigned by the logger's working seniority. The bunk located closest to the entrance door was the coldest and that occupant, who held the least seniority was required to keep the Pot Bellied Stove fired at night. The most senior logger had his bunk in the far and warmest end of the car, where he enjoyed a quite night of undisturbed sleep.

(over)

Most winter night nights in the upper Blackfoot Valley would see temperatures drop well below zero and on this particular night, the newest logger with the least seniority was also rather short in physical stature. Shortly before "Bed Time", he loaded up the Pot Belly Stove, and as soon as the fire was roaring hot, he closed the air drafts on the bottom of the stove. The "Damper" was located at the top of the stove, in the second section of stove pipe. In an attempt to close the damper in the chimney, the short logger discovered it was slightly beyond his reach.

Before I continue, and in order for you to appreciate this story---you must understand the design of a Pot Bellied Stove as compared to the anatomy of the short male logger. There was a very precious part of his physical anatomy which normally protruded outward, and the contours of a red hot Pot Belly stove now set the stage for disaster.

A slight jump was all that was required to reach and close the damper in preparation for a good nights' sleep. Now the plot thickens---He managed to jump and close the damper, but became over balanced when he landed. This action allowed the protruding part of his precious anatomy to contact the super hot Pot Belly. What happend next was total pandemonia !! --- but after the pain subsided slightly, an ingenious First Aid Procedure was initiated.

A Bull Durham Tobacco sack was filled with Vaseline and placed around the Logger's char broiled anatomy. As gray dawn signaled the end of a very long and painful night, the Short Logger, nicknamed "Stubby" was transported to a Missoula Medical Facility. Stubby was never seen or heard from again in the Blackfoot Valley logging Camps. After hearing this story, I have a totally different perspective about the hearty loggers who worked and lived in a Logging Camp. Especially the guys called Stubby!!

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