

village view

by Andrea Leonard

Several weeks ago at a Bean Supper for the benefit of the Life-Pack Fund, Centerville-Osterville Volunteer Fire Department, we got into conversation with another couple at our table.

It turned out they were Evelyn and Jack Slocum who recently retired to Osterville from Cumberland, Maryland, where Evelyn served the Department of Social Services, and Jack was employed by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad as an industrial forester.

In connection with his job Jack managed 50,000 acres of forest land owned by the railroad, and enjoyed a close relationship with loggers and sawmillers.

One year he participated in the Elkins (West Virginia) Forest Festival as the mythical Michigan logger, Paul Bunyan. Playing that part to the hilt, he wrote a number of new Paul Bunyan episodes, one of which he's agreed to share with you through this column. I think you may find it entertaining.

Titled **The Beeg Snow**, it seems particularly appropriate and fitting to wind up this most unusual of winters on Cape Cod with the following tale.

When me and Babe got back to Michigan last fall, we began noticin' a lotta strange signs all here about. The fox squirrels was storin' all the nuts they could find in the tops of the tallest pine trees. The bars was growing thick shaggy coats and was fallin' all over thimselves, trippin' on ther fur as they tumbled down the mountainsides.

The rabbits and the field mice was along the highways bummin' rides south. The wooly caterpillars, instead of havin' just a band of brown around their bellies, was all brown. In fact, all the signs pointed to a winter with a lotta snow.

Well, I din't get to be the world's best logger by hidin' behind the door when the brains was passed out. Up at our loggin' camp by the Big Pine Tree, we started gettin' things ready for a winter like Grampa used to talk about.

Yesseree, we carted in beans, taters, chicken and long-legged undiwear. We stored up coffee, dried fish, wooly mittens and hob-nailed boots. We stoked up on chocalit cake mix, axe handles and ox feed, and made certain there were enough plaid mackinaws to go around twice. We shipped all that kinda stuff in box car loads to the camp from Houghton.

We had so much gear we had to label the different buildings with signs like "Blankets", "socks" and "chocalit cake". Up here in this country we really know how to get ready for a big snow.

We patched the roof on the bunkhouse, plugged up the knotholes in the lobby, hauled in trainloads of wood for the stoves, sewed the men up in thar long handled undiwear, and then sat down to rest for a spell, waitin' for ol' man winter to show his face.

On the second Sunday in November, the barometer fell. A big black cloud whirled up over the mountain from the north and another loomed from the south; two others, one out of the east and one from the west, came rolling in to meet overhead. It started to snow.

Thunderation, it did snow. Big flakes, large as flapjacks, saucered down in a blindin', ragin', huricane of wind and hail. It snowed down, sideways, and even up.

Soon the springhouse was covered; then the ox barn, then the cookhouse and the lobby; finally I could see it was gettin' darker as the snow covered my winda in the bunkhouse.

In less time than it takes to tell about it, we was like in a cave -- dark as pitch. It got spooky-quiet. We was buried. What to do?

Well, in no time we had the stoves fired up, the kerosene lanterns lit, the stew abubblin' on the cookstove, and me and my crew was all busy playin' chuck-aluk, polki, jackstones and a weird kind of game with little white ivory cubes, guaranteed to lose your money, and your shirt as well, if you stayed with it long enough.

Gosh, we musta played for four weeks steady. There was no daylight, just one long night. We played so long we wore the squares off the chickerboards, the spades off the cards, and the spots off them evil little white cubes. Den Lordigan wound up with all the money and a stack of pants and suss-penders clear up to the ceiling.

We began to get restless. Had the snow-storm stopped? How deep was it gettin'? How deep was we buried? We decided to take a look.

First, we unhitched the stove pipe from the stove, and lookin' up through the hole the heat had made, right up through the snow, we could see light about 75 feet up. This meant that the snow was 75 feet deep. Lil Yor Kidyuwell boosted hisself to the bunkhouse roof and, by kickin around against the wall of snow with his hob-nailed boots, he gradually kicked a circular staircase spiralling upward toward the light.

After several hours of kickin', he finally arrived at the top. What a sight met his eyes! The storm was over. The sun was shinin'. The snow was sparklin' and seemed to cover the whole dang world with itself. Only the tops of the tallest pine trees stuck out. In fact, the tops of the pines and the sun is all there was that was out.

Everything else was buried. Yor slid down the snow staircase on the seat of his britches in his haste to tell us what he'd saw.

Although it was an excitin' storm, and we was all well-fed and warm and comfortable, buried as we was, our spirits were gettin' just a little mite low. We'd been cooped up in thar for a month or more and was gettin' itchy to start cuttin' timber agin.

We had a big contract with Hooker sawmill clear down the mouth of the valley and was bound to deliver them logs in the spring. We wuz, what you might say, up a snow crick with no shovel.

And we wasn't all that was gettin' rambunktious from bein' penned up so long. Babe, my beeg blue ox, was prancin' and stampin' and beatin' her stout head against the wall of her stall in the stable.

All of a sudden, just about then, she busted through the log stanchion and came tearin' through the log wall like a B & O freight train runnin' wild down the 18-mile grade.

She charged straight into the wall of snow, drivin' tunnels around and by thim big pine tree butts like a Roman candle shootin' holes in Swiss cheese.

Bang! Shed'd crash into a tree trunk. Swish! She'd reverse, and drive a tunnel off in another direction. In just about thirty minutes she had the whole dang countryside honey-combed with tunnels, runnin' thisaway and thataway, and everyway. Then she got tired and went to sleep by a crick, and snored like a ox -- which she is.

I guess you know what happened next. Den Lordigan and Johnny Inkslinger and Willy Bamergan and Yor Kidyuwell grabbed up ther axes and saws and lanterns, flung open the bunkhouse door, and raced down the tunnels in a mad run.

Chop-chop-chop, buz-buz-buz, and another tree would be cut clean through. 'Course, the trees couldn't fall bein' held up by that 75 feet of snow, but we musta cut timba for forty days and forty nights without a letup.

When we got dun we had cut every tree standin' on 23,000 acres. And still, not a tree fell. Them tunnels Babe punched had saved the day for ol' Paul Bunyan.

Lippy Lee, our chinee cook baked us up a supper of beans and sourkraut and groundhog livers and buzzard eggs, all flavored with dandy lion greens and skunk cabbage and loggers socks, the whole fried in b'ar grease, which nearly kilt us all. But we enjoyt it and ate for 19 long days 'n' nights.

And then we took a little nap for about a month.

Crash. Slam. Splash. Plop. Swish. We waked to the sound of falling trees all around the camp. The warm spring sun had melted the titanic snow imprisoning us all winter. Trees were falling like hay in a windstorm into a lake made from the melted snow and bein' swept down the valley toward Hooker's sawmill where they formed a mountainous log jam.

Well, it took Hooker's men all summer to work the jackstrawed trees up into the sawmill where they were sawed into wide pine boards for you city slickers to build your fancy houses.

Yeseree, we had quite a loggin' job the winter of the Beeg Snow. It takes more than a little frozen rain to stop Paul Bunyan from fulfillin' his timber contracts.

These goin's on may be a little hard for you to believe, but they is just as true as all the other stories I've told you from time to time.

And if you don't believe it, just ask Yor, or Lippy, or Den, or Willy, 'cause they was there, too, and seen it happen just as I tell it.

Welcome back, Paul Bunyan! And thanks, Jack Slocum.