



The Logger's Blessing...

Experience has taught me that if ever there were folk worthy of a special blessing, it's probably the legendary Canadian loggers . . . legendary because they've been part of the foundation of Canada's march to nationhood since Jacques Cartier stepped on shore. Given how the Iroquois built longhouses made of wood, the reputation of Canadians as 'hewers of wood' has likely been around a lot longer.

The thought of the need for a blessing occurred to me while finishing up my day recently with the burly and no-nonsense Tim White, owner of TJ Logging in Whitecourt, Alberta.

When Tim finally agreed to meet up with me at the typical truck stop located at the entrance of their log haul road--but only if I met him at 5:30 a.m. the next morning--I seriously started to question whether this would be my last logging contractor feature.

Over the past 20 years, I've survived snow squalls off Lake Superior on the lonely drive from Wawa to Sault Ste. Marie, a once-in-100-year snowstorm in Winterpeg where both the customers and staff were trapped in the hotel within earshot of the snowed in airport for three days, and the glare of icy roads on the drive from Grande Cache, Alberta to the Foothills Forest Products sawmill, where the only way I could stop from flying into a mountainous chasm over the guardrail was to gear down in "my wife's" minivan.

Despite my experience knowing what it sometimes takes to get the story, I wasn't sure I wanted to get up at 4:00 a.m. and drive for an hour and a half in the dark and fog to meet a logging contractor that seemed about as interested in talking to me as watching a hockey game between the New York Islanders and Minnesota Wild. But I sucked it up and gave it a go.

When I finally arrived at the truck stop, it was closed, which is a rare sight for 5:30 a.m. in resource-nuts Alberta, where bush guys wake up the rooster and business is usually brisk at that time of day.

Despite it being spooky dark, there was a lone, loaded logging truck in the parking lot--engine running--an omen maybe that everything would turn out all right.

Then came that wild fleeting thought that often floats through my head when the contractor is three minutes late--would the interviewee stand me up? It's only happened to me once in 20 years.

Nope. Tim pulled into the dimly lit parking lot a mere four minutes late. I sensed it was going to be a great day when I noticed that his truck interior was spotless, and like just about every logger, his 'friggin' phone was acting up again just after having it in the shop. I was in my element. I was home.

After a few minutes of casual conversation, we pulled into the mustering area where the logging equipment had been parked after the night shift, and I witnessed a ritual I have rarely seen before, although it probably happens at many other logging operations as well. Tim and his brother, Geordi, inspected and started all the equipment for the day crew, something they apparently do as part of their daily ritual.



The fog had also lifted and the stars were out, indicating that it would be a picture perfect day, which it was--frost on trees with a clear blue sky for background, and temperature warming throughout the day from about -12 to a balmy -1.

Throughout the day, I discovered that I truly was privileged to be spending this time with Tim, given the number of yellow sticky notes he had pasted to his front windshield of things that needed doing, and the stick-handling he did with a variety of employees throughout the logging site to make sure that work progressed.

I think I won him over when I proved I could drive a standard and helped move a half ton for one of his reclamation backhoe operators.

I was humbled, because once again I was reminded that when a logging contractor tells me he's not sure he has the time to meet with me, it's generally no BS.

So here's my blessing to all you workaholics who shake yourselves out of bed ahead of the rooster on days when at times the ice fog is thicker than the day old clam chowder at the local diner, and spit freezes before hitting the ground. You've earned it.

“May your contracts be long,

may your log decks be straight and tall,

may you survive to spring break up,

and live to log again in fall.”

. . . with at least one break for hunting season or a final fishing derby, of course.