

Whippoorwill E-Comment

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I AM A LUMBERJACK

(And I'm OK!)

[With apologies to Monty Python]

By

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I RECENTLY FULFILLED A DREAM. For the past couple of months I'd been working with a fellow doing residential tree removal. It was a fun job because you never knew what the challenge was until you got on site, like a precarious birch overhanging a power line or a monstrous spruce leaning towards a house. In one case there were several trees to be removed from a backward, with a greenhouse smack in the middle! (My comment to the homeowner, "People with glasshouses shouldn't grow trees," was lost in translation.) Anyway, right before I took off for northern Norway we had a full day taking down four trees. By five o'clock Johan was pretty tired from climbing and he surprised me with the last tree:

That one's yours, Bill."

I was thrilled, but to be honest, also anxious – and a bit scared. It was a 50' birch wedged in a backyard: 20' from the house and garage on one side, 10' from the neighbor's newly planted garden on another side, a big rhododendron just 10' from the trunk, and another birch right next to it. In short, it had to come down in

one place, a pie-wedge about 15' deep.

I strapped in the spurs and climbing harness, clipped on the carabineers, rope, chainsaw, hand-saw... Then Johan gave me his climber's helmet and goggles. When he passed his special gloves I felt like a new fledged pilot ready for his first solo. I'd always watched him carefully, but he gave me the hands-on instructions and tips (in Norwegian, of course), ending with:

"If you get into trouble, come down."

You know me well enough to know that I'm not a determined fellow if things get dicey. I fold. But this time I said, "I'm going to do it.!" I dug the spurs in, leaned back, and slowly worked my way up, cutting each limb with the deliberate moves of an orthopedic surgeon. I'll tell you, the feelings go against one's instincts. Lean away from the tree, hold on to a limb with one hand and cut it with the other. When she breaks loose you instinctively want to grab onto something, but one hand is weighted by a swinging limb, the other by a

chainsaw. And if you squeeze the chainsaw, the throttle races the engine. I was so focused on not cutting off an arm I never thought about the height – not once!

I talked to my self the whole time, measuring each move carefully, methodically. It takes little imagination; if you get in a bind up a tree, there no way for anyone to come up and help you. You're on your own. One of my greatest concerns was that a leg would give out. You know, get that sewing-machine action from muscle fatigue. I could see a spur slipping out just as a limb releases and the saw whirling inches from my face. After an hour I was starting to feel the strain, but learned to work with the harness to mitigate the stress.

When I thought I was at a point to top it, I called to Johan. Nope, he said, I had to go up another two meters. I did, but I'll tell you, the tree was quite narrow – about 6" diameter – with the spurs dug into rather soft wood. When I got high enough I said to myself, "This is it, Bill. Don't screw up. You've got only one chance..." I cut the kerf, made the back cut with extreme caution, then cut the engine, clipped the saw on the back of my harness, reached up and gave it a gentle shove. What an exhilarating thrill when the top toppled over and hit the ground, right where it should have. The tree swayed momentarily, but with a wide open view I felt like I was on top of the world.

Coming down was just as, if not more anxious than going up. I had to cut the bolts into 4-5' lengths. And, as you might expect, they get bigger, heavier as you work your way down. You cut them at chest height, and the

last thing you want it for one of those babes to pivot or hit a leg or foot on the way down. The angle of the kerf it critical! Too narrow and they fall too far away from the tree; too deep and they tip over and bang the side – where your spurs are. They last one hit hard, and somersaulted just inches from the house. (I was on one job with Johan and a 6' bolt, about 14-16" diameter, bounced and flew 10' through air – went through a hedge like a battering ram.)

When I got down Johan said, "*Kjempe bra!*" (Giant good!) The job took me about two hours of climbing with spurs, and though I was dehydrated and exhausted, I was also pumped. One of those few days in our lives when you feel like a real man – and proud of it.



This is Bill Warner's latest letter from As, Norway. He holds a Doctorate in Forestry from the University of Maine and is one of the most original thinkers I have the pleasure of knowing. Bill is the best writer of all my thousands of former students. Originally from Cleveland, OH, he married a delightful Norwegian girl and soon made his home in Scandinavia.

E-Whippoorwill Comment is the 21st century electronic journal of J. Hill Hamon, a long-time member of AAPA who lives in happy retirement in the wilds of the Bluegrass area of central Kentucky. Still a scientist, he notes we suffer what futurist, Rachel Carson, called *a silent spring*, not because of DDT, but because of the West Nile virus, which has killed most of the nation's common songbirds recently.