

Grandpa's Opera and my Opera!

I especially love Family History, Music, and Opera. Today, I got to see and think about all three right from my living room picture window while enjoying my morning coffee in my recliner.

It was live opera. Six men all dressed in bright yellow suits with reflective tape for ornamentation. You see, they were about to gracefully take down the big tree in the boulevard of neighbor's yard.

First came the truck with the bucket and the tree sculptor with 2 chain saws, a little one and a big one. After first dancing around the tree to size it up, the sculptor gets in the bucket, hooks himself up to his safety harness, and proceeds to lift himself towards the sky. But before he can begin, the music truck had to arrive. That is the truck pulling the tree shedder. One pull of the starter and the shedder is humming. Now it is time to add the sound of the small chain saw. Skillfully starting from the bottom, he removes the small trigs from the tree. Two of the 6 men present pick up the fallen trigs and feed them into the shredder creating an even more forte and higher sound of grinding trees. But there were 6 actors on stage. The 4 fourth actor must be the director. He positions himself front and center stage seeing that there is no break in the action. He also keeps a close eye on the man in the bucket. I think he has a cell phone in hand in case he needs to call 911.

The other two actors had a two ton dump truck. Their work is to come at the end on the opera.

High drama in the sky occurs. The chain comes off the chain saw. The sculptor must lower the bucket to the ground, unhook his harness, and go to his truck for repairs. He is the only one to touch the chain saws. Reminded me of the Lyric tenor who commands the stage and gets the final prize whatever it is in an opera.

Saw fixed and back to work. Time to take down the very top of the tree. The tree is split into a natural "Y" so he must take the side

leaning towards the street first. That done then on to the other side. Meantime the shedder is constantly humming with trees being devoured by it.

The time has come to cut down the main trunk. The chain is now the long blade. Starting at the very top, the sculptor gracefully wraps one arm around the trunk and cut off a four foot piece with the other hand and chain saw. He then ceremoniously lets it fall to the ground. The two ton pickup men in rhythm pick up the trunk part, one at each end, and then put it into the trunk box. This continues until the tree is all gone.

Oh yes, the 7th guy arrives with his pickup and yard hand rakes. Time to scoop up the saw dust and any scarps. Some of it goes into the shedder and some into the pickup bed. All done time to pick up the safety cones and put them in the pickup. The trucks leave one by one and the opera is over. Perfectly executed, the pickup man takes one last look around and drives off. Opera lasted 45 minutes if you do not count the men who were there the day before to assess the situation.

I must say I did enjoy this Opera, however, I was constantly reminded of my grandfather. You see He cleared 320 acres of land with just an axe and grub axes. Oh yes, there were horses and sleighs and ladders and rope.

My grandfather was about 6' 1" tall. Not heavy, but very strong. Grandpa was born in Norway in 1863. He is one of the first Norwegian Lag members in America. He came to America alone at age 19. He never returned to Norway.

His opera begins in the summer of 1897. He has homesteaded 160 acres of woods and the other 160 acres he clears is his brother-in-law's homestead. His brother in law is ill with TB and cannot farm.

Yes, Grandpa had 2 opera uniforms of different colors. They were bib overalls with matching caps. One was deep blue denim and the other one was grey and white pin striped denim. He always wore long sleeved light blue denim shirts. He had matching denim jackets for

each uniform. And he had dark blue man's sized handkerchiefs. His shoes were of soft leather with high tops. Six or so eyelet laces on the foot part with six or more hoops laces on the top or leg part of the shoe. He wore each uniform every other day. Grandma washed clothes on Mondays so because of the 7 day week, each overalls would be washed once every two weeks. Caps were seldom washed.

Grandpa cut all the trees with an axe. Many of the trees were large oaks. Some were poplar, birch, elm, ash, tamarack, and cedar. He would always look at the tree to see which way it would naturally fall. He also cut close to the ground so he could more easily direct the direction of the fall.

He grubbed all the stumps by hand. He was a good blacksmith, having learned that trade (mandatory) in school in Norway as a child. Most of the tools he used he made by hand in his blacksmith shop. He also did have 2 log saws that he could use solo.

In Grandpa's opera, the trigs were all cut into about 1 foot lengths and used to start the fire in the kitchen stove. Great kindling! The big logs were cut in lengths to fit into the pot belly stove. A big log with the stove dampers turned down would last all night. Smaller sized diameter logs were used in the kitchen stove or to start a quick fire in the parlor stove. Note: My dad and his brother slept upstairs. The only heat was a register in the floor letting in heat from downstairs. It was warm enough if in the morning, the water had not frozen in their wash basin.

Other than his axes, grandpa sometimes had his horses with him. In the winter, it was easier to use big sleds to bring the wood home. In the summer, the sleigh was a ground sleigh. No runners. Basically it was boards laid together and fastened to make a flatbed. Of course, grandfather made an iron curve to put in the front of it so it would glide on top of the dirt.

My dad taught me how to cut a big tree safely. Dad was about 6' and very strong with not excess fat. All muscle. He and his dad were very determined men. Grandpa live passed 89 and dad about 93 ½. Great

memories. Grandpa lived with us. I used to go to the blacksmith shop to work with him when he was in his eighties.

Grandpa's opera takes place in Northwestern Minnesota about 125 miles south/southeast of Winnipeg, Canada. The opera I watched today, took place in central Indiana.

Grandpa's opera was performed in about 2 years. Like today's opera, grandpa never had an accident. All work was in tune with his motto: Work is good for the soul. Do not rush but keep your sites on the completion of the task.

"My Opera" today was just in my mind. If I had had grandpa's axe available, I would have loved to have cut down that tree with an axe at 3 o'clock in the morning just to prove I could do it by myself. Thankfully I did not do that. I live in a city. But it sure was fun thinking of the good times of cutting trees with my dad. Again, never an accident. And yes, also remembering my twin sister and I pulling stumps with the tractor at a very early age. Broke more than one chain doing that. Any way that was about 7 decades ago.

Written by Richard