

Lumberjack Story
Lake Alturas "Eclipse Camp"
Denver C. Snuffer, Jr.
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Denver: And see that works really well if your watch says 11:28 when it's 11:28. Mine probably says 11:28 when it's 11:40. Since this is all over with, and since there's some kids here, I wanted to tell a story. This, this is true story. I, I grew up in Idaho and I actually worked for the Sawtooth Lumber Company, which does not exist any more. Boise Cascade bought 'em out. But there was a time when the Sawtooth Lumber Company could win a bar fight at Featherville against the Boise Cascade boys.

Female from audience: There are kids here. [Laughter.]

Denver: Well, that's who I'm talking to. [Laughter]

Denver: So, when you go... I worked for the lumber company, I cut down trees. When you cut down a tree the tree wants to fall in a very specific place, and when you walk up to it with a chainsaw you have to stand at the bottom and look at it. If a ~~log~~ [tree] is perfectly symmetrical and perfectly straight you can make it fall anywhere you want it to. If there's more branches on one side than another it will only fall that way. If it's leaning in one direction it doesn't matter what the branches are doing, it's only gonna fall that way.

The boss, Junior Ownsby, who never came out to watch us work, one day showed up to watch our crew. And our foreman who ran our crew was named Budd. Budd and Junior ~~Ownsby~~ [Ownsby] were up on the road, the dirt road that had been cut in and they were standing there watching **me**. And I'd walked up to a tree that literally – it didn't matter how long I looked at it – it was like the corkscrew tree in the parable. There was no way to figure out where this thing was gonna fall. And I thought, "Maybe I'll leave this for someone else 'cuz I'm kind of afraid." This, this was a very big tree. It was gonna kill someone and I'd just assumed it wasn't me. But when I turned to leave it, the foreman yelled, "Get on with it!" So I got on with it, and I cut a wedge out. And it looked to me like this damn thing could go anywhere so what difference does it make, if you don't know where it's gonna go, what you do to it. So I cut a wedge out of it and I think, "Maybe they'll leave and cutting the wedge will be enough," but they were still standing there watching me, like, "Let's see what the idiot does!"

In addition to all of the other problems this tree had, termites had it eaten quite a bit of the inside, but the wedge didn't reveal that. I set about cutting the tree down to connect up with the wedge, and about a third of the way through there was not enough remaining support for the tree to stay up, and it started to move. But it didn't move like it was gonna fall. It moved like twisting on the trunk which trapped my chainsaw. So I let go of it as it moved around and I was thinking, "Wow, this is gonna be a disaster!" And I backed away from the thing with my chainsaw left behind, still running, and this was not a model of how you drop a tree. This was a model of: How much insurance do we have for these guys? The tree

twisted, it made a horrible splintering sound, exactly what you don't want to do to a tree, and then it fell. And, I ran like back and forth trying to figure out where it was gonna land because it was not... it was shimmying. And when it finally fell to the ground I picked up where it was going and I thought, "Oh, good. I'll be safe here." Except the tree was like a corkscrew, and when it hit the ground, because of the twist on the tree, it jumped backwards.

I still own the orange hard hat I wore that day. The base of the tree, which was bigger around than about two of those, flew back right at my head and hit the bill of that hardhat and sent it flying up the hill. I managed to duck and leave my head intact but my hard hat is now about half way between me, the owner of the company, and my foreman. I left my chainsaw running and I walked up the hill to get my hard hat back and put it on -because you're supposed to wear it if you're out there cutting trees down -and I can still remember the quote from the owner to the foreman. But because this is a story for the kids I won't repeat it. But he was anything but impressed. So, in addition to every other reason why they would leave that tree up in the parable on the hill and not touch it, messing with things like that gets lumberjacks killed. And there was a time when I was, briefly, a lumberjack. Anyway, that's my story. That's your goodnight story. So there it is. [clapping and laughter]

That really happened.