

## New in Town: Ode to My Maul

By Shannon Romtvedt



I can't help but chat with a piece of wood when I'm attacking it with a maul. It's not a thorough conversation, more an onslaught of commentary and curse words. "Are you ready for me?" I might ask, revving myself up. "Conked that sucker out," I'll say if the log falls off the chopping block without splitting. I use that one primarily as an intimidation tactic for the rest of the pile. I like my ineffective maneuvers to appear intentional.

"She's weepin'," my husband announces whenever a stubborn piece finally fractures. "Here comes the roundhouse!" I'll warn if a log is particularly obstinate. The move is still in the works, but I imagine the log splitting out of sheer nervousness. I much prefer a good "One hit split!" I still impress myself when it happens and make the proclamation, fists raised in the air.

Aside from talking while I split, I like the process of reading firewood. I would have never thought to compare the two, but wood-splitting and palm reading have definite similarities. You

look at the lines, curves, imperfections. A palm's ragged love-line is akin to a crack running the face of a round-- all evidence points toward a quick split. Gnarled knots in a limb are bad news. I'm sure if a palm had knots, that would be bad news too.

At this point, splitting firewood is recreational. It hasn't yet sunk in that heating my home with a wood stove will take a constant mix of loading, schlepping, chopping, stacking, and rooting around for the next supply. I'm still shocked by the amount of detail and labor involved in preparation. Several months have been dedicated to research, selection, measuring for a hearth, price negotiations, laying the platform, selecting stone, cutting, piecing together and grouting stone, dreaming about and cursing stone, transporting and installing the wood stove, talking constantly about wood heat, and now gathering and splitting firewood. The entire process was definitely a combined effort and I'll step on a podium for a second to thank both sets of parents, my neighbors, two or three random Vernonians, and in particular, my husband Brady for all the hard work.

When asked how many cords to

procure the first year, my father-in-law declared that wood in the stack is better than money in the bank. It crossed my mind that I could quite literally have more wood stacked than money in the bank, but who's counting? Up went a shelter to house a collection of wet maple, sort-of dry willow, really wet alder and bone dry fir (still in the works). Our style has been to take what's available first and worry about need later. If I knew I would be celebrating the Fourth of July huddled by my wood stove, I may have rethought the approach.

Load number one of our precious supply was trucked over by my dad as a housewarming present. He originally gifted me all the wood from his trimmed

maples, but when he caught wind of my fun, he decided to keep the rest of the offering and get his own wood stove. I guess the Wood/Bank proverb convinced him. I imagine we'll be comparing stacks for years to come.

More maple fell on my doorstep (or pretty darn close) when my three-trunked giant was given what Marvin of T n' T Topping referred to as a "haircut." Weeks later, my yard is still decorated with approximately half a cord of "hair" and I've come to think I will never see the root of it. Maybe if someone told me

there was an ever-burning piece beneath the heap, I'd have more motivation to finish the job.

Sort of dry willow was purchased via, er, Craigslist. Word to the wise, be wary of firewood posted on Craigslist. Thoroughly question the seller and, if at all possible, think better of the idea and go local. I'll tell you the willow's full story sometime if we run into each other. It involves many insect varieties and a bit of rot.

The most recent and much cleaner haul came from my neighbors, three lots up. "Aren't you pretty?" I might say to a piece of alder from this batch. So fresh and wet, it's the color of a yam and splits like an apple. The wood will be useless for two years, but it's quite the showpiece and I lug out a round to chop whenever I think a neighbor will pass by.

Now all that's left, apart from a future of stacking and ash scooping, is to come up with some good wood chopping jokes. Faced with my pile, round on the block, I've yet to come up with a quippy one liner in the heat of the chop. I must say the vocabulary is rich with opportunity, so I'm not sure what's holding me back. Knotty and bucked up for example. You can't go wrong using that kind of jargon. The possibilities are positively side-splitting.

**Word to the wise, be wary of firewood posted on Craigslist.**

## BETWEEN THE LINES: *Riding with the Law-- Part II*

By Randy Sanders

randy.sanders@live.com

*This is the second installment in a series of articles that Randy Sanders is writing about his experiences while riding with the Columbia County Sheriff's Department and other law enforcement agencies.*

With all the rage lately concerning limited government, I worry we might end up cutting our nose to spite our face. It's become sport to shout each other down regarding this whole "limited government" fad. Partisanship has become so bitter that we've lost the ability to prioritize the very items deemed most important to our survival.

Hopefully, most of us can agree there are essential components needed to maintain a civilized and decent society. I'm confident we can find common ground and agree that there are important services our government shall provide. My big three are: military, fire and rescue, public safety (ie: police protection and the justice system, including prosecutors and jails). To explain, a competent military defends our sovereignty, fire and rescue comes to our aid when we are in our weakest and most vulnerable state and public safety fights crime and prosecutes those who commit them.

I hope to illustrate the importance of providing moral and financial support to those who literally risk their lives each day to protect us from a growing threat of crime in Columbia County. I rode along with the sheriff's deputies hoping to provide a window into their lives and allow you to be the judge of whether or not you deem them worthy of your support.

By the time I arrived at the

Sheriff's Department at 5:00 P.M. to ride with Deputy Jones (names have been changed to protect their identity), he was already five calls behind. Budget cuts meant no other deputies were on patrol. He pulled out a slew of subpoenas (required by the state to be delivered by each county sheriff's department) from behind the desk in a quiet, empty sheriff's office.

"If we have any time, we'll try and deliver these," he said, waving them in front of me.

"But aren't you already a few calls behind?" I asked.

"Sure, but we'll try," he said with a smile and reassuring tone.

He showed me notations on every card that were marked each time an attempt was made by a deputy to deliver.

"Some of these we tried almost a dozen times with no success," he added. "Deputies bring a handful with, but when things get dicey, well, we have to prioritize. If we got a domestic call (a physical abuse confrontation, usually a husband and wife situation) when we are trying to deliver a subpoena, we immediately divert our attention to that call."

As we opened the doors to the squad car, another new call came in, a theft outside of St. Helens.

"Don't you ever get overwhelmed?" I asked as he pulled out onto Highway 30.

"Oh yeah, every night. But you have to keep things prioritized. Do the most important things first, then, go back and pick up the things that you put on the back burner."

I thought about the serious crimes that have been committed lately: rapes, big drug busts and even murders, most happening when there was just

a lone deputy on duty covering south Scappoose to Clatskanie and all the way back to Vernonia.

"So what happens if a situation arises where you need some serious backup?" I asked.

"I've responded to calls up on Pittsburg Road where a man is jacked up on meth and has beat up his wife, had an automatic weapon," Deputy Jones smiles, answering calmly. "Ya call for one of the cities to back you up. St. Helens, Rainier, ya know. If they're busy, then you have to get an off-duty deputy out of bed. The guys are pretty good about it."

As we turned up Sykes Road to address the theft, a speeding vehicle passed us. The deputy quickly eyed the speed gun mounted on the dash reading 69 mph. He kicked on the lights and made an abrupt turn and was in pursuit. As he silently raced to catch up and ultimately pull over the speeding

vehicle, I tried to do the math in my head of how many calls had stacked up and which ones now were priority, plus those pesky subpoenas still left to deliver. I was already overwhelmed. Deputy Jones later confided that this was a very slow evening.

Before he dropped me off at my car, I asked him if he ever thinks about packing it in.

"Oh, no, never. I love my job and I love living here in Columbia County. I will hopefully retire as a Sheriff's Deputy. This is a great place to raise your kids."

As I drove home, I wondered how many people-- now fast asleep-- had any idea what it was like keeping their community safe?

*Next Issue: Part III--High speed response, parole violations and a trip to the morgue.*

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