

can be recommended for young persons' libraries.

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Tall Tale Retold

S.D. NEILL

Paul Bunyan: Superhero of the Lumberjacks, John D. Robins. Edited by Edith Fowke. Illus. by Norm Drew. Toronto, N.C. Press Limited, 1980. 112 pages. ISBN 0-919601-13-8.

Although the tales of Baron Munchausen were common in our home, I have never, myself, had a "hankerin'" to tell tall tales – until I read these versions of Paul Bunyan stories by John Robins. Paul Bunyan yarns have tended to bore me, but Robins' language is full of life and is as real as you'll get on the printed page (with the cusswords omitted).

I have never worked in the bush, but I did work with men who came out of the camps in the summer to build and repair the roads at the Lakehead. The grammar and swing of the sentences in these stories felt familiar and comfortable – so much so that I read the book at a sitting and felt as if the words were mine. I thought, "I can tell these tales with this language and be right at home."

Of course, all northerners tell stories of cold winters (mainly because they are true), so "The Winter of the Blue Snow" is typical of tall tales laid in the Algoma country north of The Soo. This one begins:

I've heerd some of you bellyachin' about this bein' a hard winter. That just makes me bust out laughin', that does. Why you aint never saw no real winter yet, an' you aint never goin' to. This old earth couldn't stand another one.

John Robins was an English professor at the University of Toronto until his death in 1952. I can imagine him telling versions of the blue snow to his colleagues. I've told some true anecdotes of the kind in ordinary conversation.

I was also struck by the attitude of Paul's loggers to Paul as a boss, something I hadn't noticed in other collections, and I remember bosses like him:

Well, I looks at Paul and Paul looks at me, an' then we both just laid down on the ground an' rolled an' laughed fit to bust. Now old Paul didn't do that kinda thing as a gen'ral rule. He didn't make hisself common, 'cause he knowed just as well as anybody else that he wasn't no common cuss. But him an' me was pretty nigh raised together, an' I guess he felt he could kinda let out a little with me an' let off steam.

But by the humpin' boys, when them times come an' Paul did cut up some, you got to mind your horses after. He wouldn't stand for no monkey business, or takin' advantage.

Edith Fowke has edited this collection, as she did when it was first published in 1957 under the title *Logging With Paul Bunyan* (Ryerson Press). She has added a four page description of lumbering in Ontario, an account of the Paul Bunyan legend and of the way Robins learned the stories while working in the camps, and a bibliography of some writings about Paul Bunyan.

The book has a colourful paper cover, is approximately 8'' by 5'', and is suitable for children in the later grades – and for adults to read for their own enjoyment. The illustrations by Norm Drew are simple line drawings not unlike cartoons in style and are useful in clarifying details of the stories.

Even if you have other books of Bunyan tales, Robins' re-tellings are full of local colour and fresh detail and are well worth having.

S.D. Neill is a professor at the School of Library and Information Science, The University of Western Ontario. He teaches, among other things, a course in Storytelling as well as a course in the history of children's literature. As a public librarian, he was formerly engaged in storytelling throughout the northeastern part of Ontario.