Sam Sprucetree

MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY
SORT OF

CONSOLIDATED PAPERS, INC.
WISCONSIN RAPIDS, WISCONSIN

Over the years our mills have used many of Sam's brothers, sisters, cousins, and kinfolk of all classes. If laid end to end, side by side, or any other way you care to pile pulpwood, the wood from these trees would stretch a long ways and make a large pile. Spruce has always been an important pulpwood to us and even now half of all the wood we use is this species.

But we have taken Sam and his relatives as a matter of course. His autobiography has made us do some thinking. Sam's life story makes us feel a little ashamed of our neglect of him during the first 25 years of our existence. Actually we were in much the same position as Sam during that period. For both of us it was a stage of early growth and, as Sam's life was a constant battle against natural enemies, our life was a struggle against economic forces.

More than four decades ago we started our forestry program. That was the beginning of a new life for Sam Sprucetree and his friends and relatives who live and raise little spruces in our industrial forests. As Sam's living standards have improved over the years so has our company prospered. We can look back over the years, as Sam has in his story, and see that we have had a good life too, and we are glad to have a part in the industrial development of Wisconsin.

We hope that Sam's story will give you a fuller appreciation of the life and problems of pulpwood trees in the forest.

CONSOLIDATED PAPERS, INC.

SAM SPRUCETREE

Couple days ago a forester came by with his paint gun and squirted a big yellow button on me. I've seen that happen to other trees, and being an old timer around here, I know what it means. That yellow mark means that I'm about to be harvested.

Say! I had better introduce myself. My moniker is Sam. I'm a spruce tree — a big one. A few months from now I'll be holding down a bunk in Consolidated's pulpwood yard. But right now I'm bull of the woods on a little patch of ground in one of Consolidated's industrial forests.

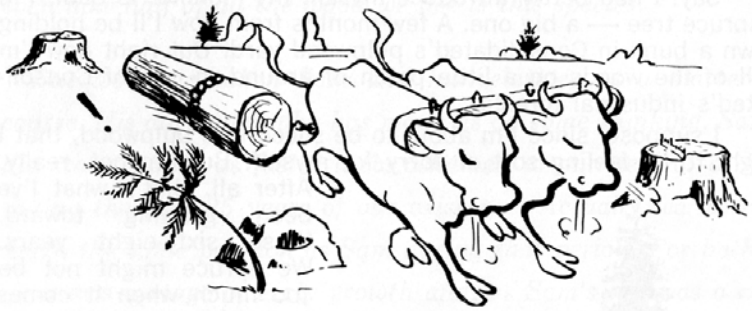
I suppose, since I'm about to be sliced into pulpwood, that I ought to be feeling sort of sorry for myself. But I'm not, really. After all, that's what I've been growing toward, these sixty-eight years. We spruce might not be too much when it comes to lumber, but when you talk about pulp, we're it. And that makes us spruce trees feel a mite proud.

A lot of you older folks, especially if you get to be sort of famous or important, sit down and ruminate around a bit, and first thing you know, out comes your autobiography. Now I know I'm not famous at all, and maybe one single tree isn't very important to the mill, but I've had a good life out here. I've stood in this same spot for a long time. A lot of things have happened around me. And believe me, this country is a lot better place for us trees to live than it used to be. Say — I'm going to tell you my story — sort of an autobiography like.

You know — the year 1904 was sort of an important year for Consolidated and their first mill . . . and brother, it was important for me, too. It came durned near being my last year. Holy old mackinaw! I'll never forget that experience.

That was the year the pine was cut out of my home forty. I was a little shaver then — hardly two ax handles high. There were a lot of seedlings around — some of them bigger than me, some

smaller. Standing over us, sort of protecting like, were some big white pines. Then the loggers moved in with their axes and saws. Man! Did the ground shake when those pine trees came down. It was like the end of the world. In fact, it was the end of the world for many of my seedling pals. Brother, when fifty tons of white pine land on top of you, you're flat, and make no mistake about it.



I didn't have any trouble with the falling trees, but it was during the skidding when I nearly cashed in my chips. When I shut my eyes, I can still see those two oxen plod along dragging that big log. It came right towards me, a-chewing and grinding everything in its path.

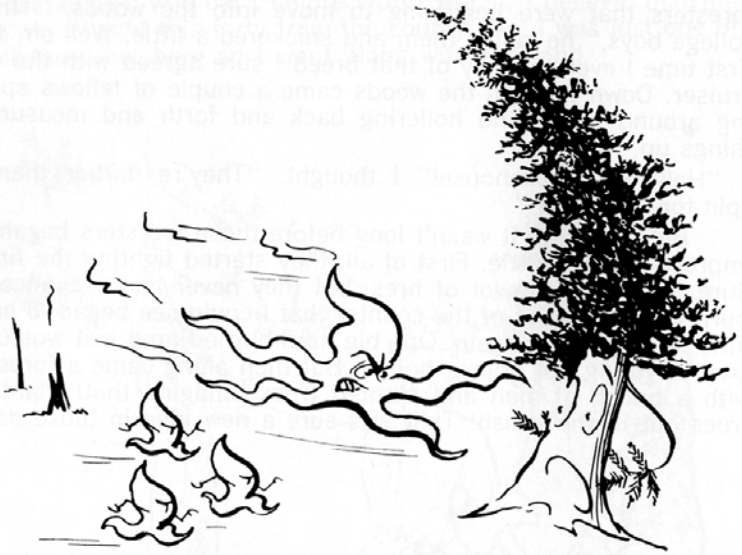
"Jumping catfish," I screeched. "There'll never be any nest of robins in the hair of this here spruce!"

Just as it was about to erase me neatly from the face of the earth that big stick hit a rock, rolled a few inches sideways, and slithered past me. I got pretty well scraped up. In fact, I was a sick looking spruce for a couple years and for a long time I had a scar deep in me that ached whenever I leaned with a hard wind.

I couldn't do much about thanking the rock then, but as I grew bigger my roots spread out and patted that hunk of granite. The old rock is still down there being hugged by my roots.

By the time the loggers got through the pines were all gone and a lot of my seedling chums were done in, too. But I was wrong when I thought the logging was the end of the world. What followed was ten times worse. Fire! Holy old Nellie! Didn't it burn, though. Three times the flames came aroaring and sparking and charring up across our forty. Three times I looked out over a charcoal-colored landscape.

Me — I was lucky. I was sitting at the north end of the swamp. That old wet patch protected me from the worst of the fire. Sure, lots of the little chaps near me got burned up, but I was pretty husky by then and all I got was a good hot-foot.



Gradually most of the timber in these parts was cut. During the First World War the country was pretty well picked over for timber. You folks must have used a lot of paper then, too, for the loggers were sure out looking for spruce. This big swamp which saved me from the fires was cut off slicker than a whistle. But I was too small to interest the cutters in those days.

Many of my neighbors then were white pine trees about my own age. Those young white pines were sort of delicate characters, and every year a few of them would pass out due to a combination of blister rust and weevil. Weevils don't touch spruce very often but I had a bout with one. You'd never know it to look at me now. Those guys kill the very tip of a tree. Man! Did I have a headache that year. I was in the market for an aspirin for sure. That old bug left me with a crooked trunk for quite a few years.

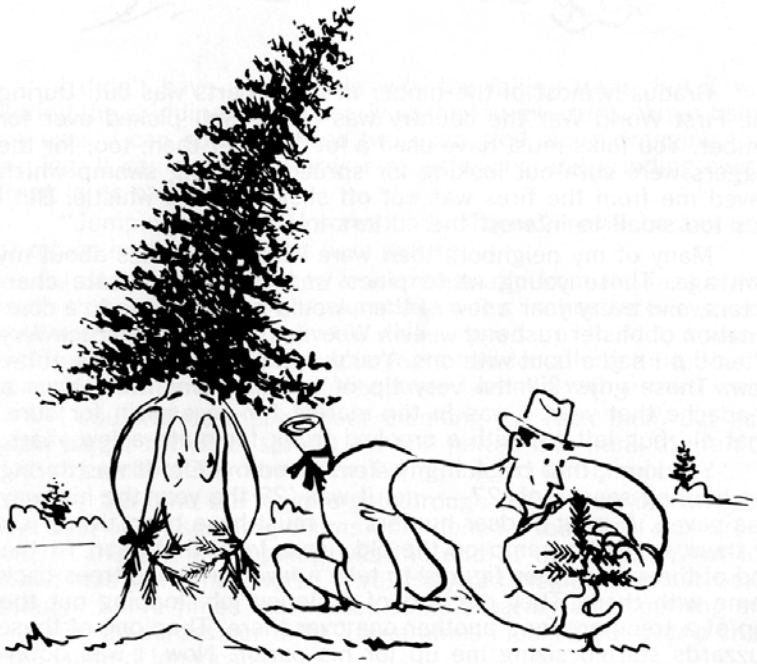
You know, that crook in my stem saved my life. It was during the hunting season of '27 — no, it was '28 the year the highway was paved. A gang of deer hunters — must have been five or six of them — had a camp on the old home forty that year. At the end of the season they figured to take a few Christmas trees back home with them. They did sort of a sloppy job, lopping out the top of a tree here, and another one over there. Then one of those buzzards started sizing me up for his parlor. Now, I was down-

right symmetrical from one side, if I do say so myself, and he was just about ready to lay me low. He stepped back and surveyed me from another angle and spotted my weevil crook. That old hunched back was my ticket to a longer and more useful life.

One day I overheard an old timber cruiser complain about the foresters that were beginning to move into the woods. "Them college boys," he called them and snickered a little. Well sir, the first time I ever saw any of that breed I sure agreed with the old cruiser. Down through the woods came a couple of fellows apacing around about and hollering back and forth and measuring things up.

"Holy old smokehouse!" I thought. "They're daffier than a split-tongued loon."

But you know it wasn't long before those foresters began to improve things a little. First of all, they started fighting the fires. Sure, we still had a lot of fires, but they never had a chance to burn very big. A lot of the country that I could see began to have little trees growing again. One big hard-burned area just wouldn't grow anything but grass, though. But then along came a forester with a bunch of men and planted trees. Imagine that! Planting trees out in the brush! That was sure a new idea in those days.



Today, of course, everybody accepts planting as the normal thing to do. There are millions of trees planted every year. But say, I'm getting a little ahead of my story.

Yes sir, those fellows began to change things. I remember the first marking I ever saw. That was after I started working for Consolidated. It was back before World War II, I believe, that the company bought this forty from the county. Me, I was just one of the fixtures out here so I went along with the land.

Well, during the war the pulpwood cutters were out scouring the countryside again. The few big old spruce trees that dotted the sky line began to disappear. So I figured, "Sam, this is the year." Then along comes the company forester with a gadget in his hand. He started sizing up each tree in our grove along the edge of the swamp here. That fellow looked at us so hard that it made us trees plumb embarrassed. Seems like he could tell more about us than we knew about ourselves. After he looked us over, that forester fellow aimed his gadget and squirted a blob of yellow paint on about half of us. The rest of us, including yours truly, he left undecorated. I felt sort of put out at first until a few days later when a couple of loggers came in and started cutting down the painted trees.

One day that forester strolled back to see the loggers. They jabbered a while and then one of those cutters started waving his arms around and pointing at different trees, including me. The forester held out his hand, thumbs down. Then he started talking. "Look," he said to those fellows, "those big balsams you're cutting down now. They're good big trees. But look at the short leaders and the rough bark and the woodpecker holes. Those are old trees that are going to fall down before too long. But there's a lot of pulpwood in them and you're going to cut them down before they fall. Now that balsam over there is big, too. But you can tell by looking at him that he's young and vigorous. You aren't going to cut him. And that spruce there — he's a dandy, a good source of seed."

I puffed out whatever chest a tree has to puff out.

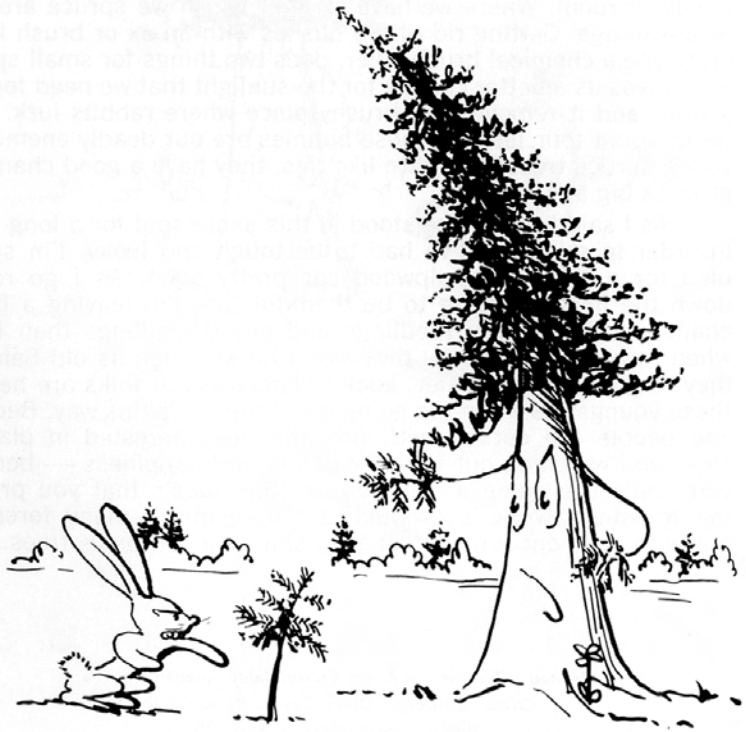
"That spruce," continued the forester, "is still growing fast, too. Now that spruce and balsam, and the other trees that aren't marked, are going to keep on growing pulpwood for us for a few more years. And another thing — those trees are going to drop a lot of seed and all the skid trails that you are gouging out in the ground are ideal places for seedlings to start. Those trees we're leaving are going to work for us in two ways."

We trees, of course, know things like that. And believe me, we're sure happy that you folks are beginning to understand some of those facts.

Sometimes, though, we trees get fooled too. I don't suppose many of you know Ole Johnson's old place. It's in the next forty east of me. Ole scratched around at farming for many years but he never quite made a real farm out of the place. I guess it was just the wrong soil and climate for what he was trying to do. Then about three or four years ago a lot of activity started up there again. "Brother," I thought, "won't people ever learn."

But this time I was wrong. That turned out to be the craziest looking farm you ever saw. It had a lot of roads and paths laid out sort of square-like. And all over the place there was plain and fancy machinery — some of it romping about, some of it just creeping along.

Things began to get a little green over there. It didn't look like spuds. It wasn't laid out right for clover or oats. Finally I recognized the crop. It was trees — spruce trees — millions of the little beggars! That place wasn't really any farm at all. It was a nursery — a forest nursery where they grow little trees for my forester friends to plant in the woods.



From here that nursery looks sort of pretty in a squared-up sort of fashion. But to me the prettiest part of it is the fact that a lot of those little trees are my offspring. They're my own wood and sap.

In the years I've stood here I've produced millions of seeds. But you know, as I look around I can count my own seedlings on the needles of one tiny twig. We spruce trees aren't much for big families. In the first place our seed is so durned fussy. In order to sprout it has to fall on just exactly the right kind of ground. Then you might not believe it when you look at me, but as little seedlings we're the puniest plants in the woods. What with frost and sun scald and drought and smothering by leaves and grass, there aren't many of us that get up big enough for the rabbits to chew back down again.

We spruce hate to admit it but I guess it's true. The way to grow a lot of spruce is to start us in the nursery as incubator babies. And then after you plant us in the field, take care of us because we're sort of temperamental.

How do you take care of spruce? Well first of all don't expect us to grow very well on poor soil. A forester will plant pine on sandy land but he uses his best soils for spruce. Then he gives us plenty of room. Where we have to fight brush we spruce are at a disadvantage. Getting rid of the bushes with an ax or brush knife, or maybe a chemical brush killer, does two things for small spruce — it gives us a better chance for the sunlight that we need for fast growth and it removes the brushy place where rabbits lurk. Until we're about four feet tall those bunnies are our deadly enemies. If young spruce trees have care like this, they have a good chance to grow as big as I am.

As I said before, I've stood in this same spot for a long time. In order to stay here I've had to be tough and lucky. I'm scheduled for a ride in a pulpwood car pretty soon. As I go rolling down the line I'm going to be thankful that I'm leaving a better chance in life for my seedlings and grand-seedlings than I had when I was young. Maybe they won't be as tough as old Sam but they're going to be luckier. Luckier because you folks are helping these youngsters when the going gets tough. It's this way. Because you people are careful with fire and are interested in planting trees and watching out for their health and happiness — because you really live some of the conservation ideals that you preach, the foresters' work is productive. There aren't many foresters, but with your encouragement they can do a lot for us trees.

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