

DAVY LOWE

by Shari Siamon

Davy Lowe, a prospector, began mining more than 40 years ago. He didn't strike it rich, but he enjoyed his life in the woods. As he grew older, he still lived alone in his cabin near Larder Lake in Ontario, Canada. He still went out every day to work his mining claims. Davy's cabin was small. It was just one crowded room with a bunk, a wood stove, and many mining maps. Ore samples and prospecting tools spilled off the shelves. But there was 'f. always room in Davy's home for the many visitors from Larder Lake. If they were lucky, Davy would tell about his life as a prospector. Here is one of the stories that he told.

One spring my partner, Fred, and I were prospecting for gold up north of here. It was back in the 1940s. We had stumbled on some good rock-the kind that often contains gold. We pounded away at that rock all day. It was after sunset when we finished breaking it up. Our samples were mighty exciting! Even in the little light that was left, we could see gold in them. We knew that we had to stake our claim that night. If we didn't, someone else might beat us to it. Fred left to pace off our claim while I cut a post to mark the first corner. I had my choice of two trees for that post. Right beside a strong poplar was a skinny birch, no bigger around than my arm. The birch would have been faster and easier to cut, but I decided on the poplar. I swung my ax, and soon I had chopped the tree off about three feet from the ground. It made a good post.

I was squaring off the top when I felt a tap on my shoulder. I thought it was Fred, coming back for something. I swung around with my ax in my hand. And there he was-a great black bear, almost as tall as myself. He was sitting back on his haunches, staring at me. I was so surprised that I just stared right back in disbelief. I had never known a bear to do such a thing. Then I panicked. His next tap might not be so gentle. I heard that you can make a bear back off if you hit it on the nose-that's the tenderest spot a bear has. So I let this fellow have it right on the nose with the back of my ax. Well, I misjudged that bear. He backed off a bit, but he also got mad! I could see that I would have to get out of there. My best chance was up the tree. But the only tree around was that skinny birch. I sure wished that I had been lazy and left the poplar! I made it up the tree in one leap, and the bear was right behind me. He reared up against the trunk, ripping the bark

with his claws. If he wanted to get me, he didn't have to worry any. That birch was slowly bending in half. Soon I would drop right in his lap. We stayed that way for a while-me clinging to the swaying tree, the bear deciding if he should start climbing. Suddenly, I could hear my partner crashing through the bush toward us. "Fred!" I yelled. "There's a bear! Watch out!" I didn't want him to stumble into the bear in the dusk. My shouting seemed to make the bear even madder. He growled and shook my poor stick of a birch tree. Well, I thought it was the end of me. The bear was growling, the tree was groaning, and my arms were ready to give up. I could feel myself slipping lower and lower, nearer to those claws every second. Then CRACK! The tree broke and I was falling.

At the same instant, a hair raising sound came ringing through the trees. I hit the ground right beside my bear. But as I rolled one way, he took off the other way. He ran as fast as he I could to get away from the frightful clanging. When I stood up, I saw Fred banging a hammer against an old steel dinner gong. We had picked it up at an empty logging camp and hung it on our tent pole as a joke. That's the same gong you see hanging outside my cabin right now. I still use it to scare off bears. You see, that night I learned what a bear hates most-the sound of steel striking steel.