Biography of Thomas Jefferson Scribner

Born 11 May 1899, Baraga, Baraga County, Michigan
Died 25 September 1982, Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz County, California
Lumberman, Musician, Newspaper Publisher, Revolutionary

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Authored By:

Laura Cooper Fenimore
Granddaughter of Thomas Jefferson Scribner through his daughter Grace

From Tom's Own Collection

Tom was born in 1899 on the upper peninsula of Michigan in the town of Baraga, on a small bay on Lake Superior in the copper country of Michigan. Tom was the grandson of a Michigan Civil War Volunteer Infantryman (who had perished during the war, leaving a widow and two young sons), and the son of a Bay City-Saginaw, Michigan area lumberjack who had worked as an edgerman in sawmills his whole life. In the tradition of his Scribner forebears, Tom's family trailed after the lumber industry booms. The civil war had devastated Tom's father's family's economic resources; the widow and her family were always struggling to make ends meet, and that poverty continued in Tom's own immediate family.

Earlier generations of Scribners had arrived at the time of the founding of New England settlements in New Hampshire in the early 1600s. An early Scribner ancestor became a part owner of a lumbermill in Exeter, New Hampshire — thus establishing the family pursuit of lumbering for a livelihood. Later generations of Scribners (including the relative who invented the *Scribner Log Scale)* eventually moved from the great northern woods of New Hampshire into newly opened settlements in Maine in the mid-1700s. A few generations later our Scribners moved to new lumber harvest areas in northern Maine; less than a generation later, our Scribners left Maine to move to Oneida County, New York during the construction of the Erie canal and then into the Lake states interior after the canal opened in the 1820s. By the late 1800s, the Pine was essentially exhausted in Saginaw and Bay City, Michigan, and Tom's father took his family to the upper Michigan peninsula, and then to the northern woods of Minnesota at Cloquet, Gemmell, and International Falls. International Falls was across the river from Fort Frances, Ontario, Canada. There was a Shevlin-Hixon lumbermill in Fort Frances where Tom's brother Charles N. Scribner had worked as a sawyer until he joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Ironically, Charles was sent to Europe -- only to be put to work as a sawyer in a mill in France (but for far less pay). Tom relocated to the west coast as a young man, and by the 1920s even Tom's father had moved his family to the west coast to follow the timber booms.

In the 1920 census enumeration Tom was listed as a boarder in Tacoma, Washington, staying with Clara Lucas.

Thomas joined the U.S. Army in 1922, and was eventually assigned to Company G of the 35th U.S. Infantry, stationed at Schofield Barracks in Honolulu, Hawaii. [Tom said that when the tides came in they would flood the barracks!] Tom was promoted to sergeant on 14 August 1922. Later, for reasons that are unknown to the family, Tom deserted his duty and subsequently spent 1 year in Leavenworth Prison. Members of the Steele family state that Tom's politics were radicalized when he was in prison, and he departed prison an avowed Communist. Tom insisted throughout his life that he deliberately chose to be a communist because he *wholeheartedly believed* in a certain idea: he envisioned no rich and no poor in a workers commonwealth. Tom held to those beliefs passionately and completely throughout his entire life; those were still his sentiments at the end of his life in the 1980s.

Tom Scribner was one of the last living veterans of the Industrial Workers of the World, an early union which numbered more than 150,000 members and many more sympathizers at the height of its influence in 1919. The "Wobblies," who led the movement of the migrant workers of the west, preached of the "one big union" and "one big strike" that would bring economic and social equality. Young Scribner's heroes included IWW balladeer Joe Hill, executed before a Utah firing squad; Eugene Debs, who urged workers to refuse service in World War I and ran for president from his prison cell; Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, who helped lead a mass strike of women textile workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and Big Bill Haywood, who shot it out with company gunmen in the mine wars of the Rockies.

Tom married Dixie Steele in 1927. Dixie and Tom shared their commonly and deeply held political beliefs. Since they were, technically, first cousins, the consanguinity laws of Washington did not allow them to get married. So, instead they were married in Portland, Oregon, just across the Columbia River from Washington State.

Here is Tom's own description of his life, culled from various publications, manuscripts, and other writings:

Tom's Own Words

"I first got involved with the IWW in 1907, long before I even went to work. I was eight years old, selling *Collier's, Country Gentlemen, The Saturday Evening Post* and the *Saturday Blade* in the logging camps near my home in Gemmel, Minnesota. After a while, the Wobblies in the camps were asking, "hey kid, why don't you bring us the *Industrial Workers, solidarity and the Masses (IWW* and socialist papers)? We'll buy them." Not knowing about them, Tom's older sister Grace, who was an associate of Dr. Harry F. Ward of Union Theological Seminary sent the family subscriptions to the "Solidarity" "The Appeal to Reason" and the "Masses" magazine so Tom became acquainted with the Socialist Philosophy and the concept of a Class struggle at an early age. So he asked his dad. "God almighty no," he said. "them's red publications. You don't want to go selling them." "My old man -- worked as an edgerman all his life -- wasn't for socialism, but then he wasn't against it either. So after a while I was selling them anyway."

My dad had been in the Knights of Labor, but he didn't like the IWW. He said they were too goddamn radical. Those were the words he used. He said he would never accept the idea that the working class and the employing class had nothing in common. But he knew damn well it was true. In 1912 he took me to a political rally at the Bijou Theater in Duluth, Minnesota. The main speakers were Eugene Victor Debs ad Big Bill Haywood. Daniel DeLeon was there, too. It was a campaign to elect Eugene V. Debs president of the United States on the Socialist ticket. My father warned me, "Remember, he's a great speaker, an influential speaker, a good orator, but what he's talking about is just a dream. It can't happen. It'd be a good thing if it could happen, but it can't." At that time Haywood was still in the Socialist Party and a backer of Debs, whereas most of the Wobblies weren't. The other wing, the anarchists and syndicalists, didn't believe in any kind of political action. They said Debs was just another politician and wouldn't back him. The political wing did, and when the split came, the political wing mainly went into the Communist movement..

Seven years later in 1914, I was old enough to go to work in the woods for the Weyerhauser Timber Company near Cloquet, Minnesota. Although I had only finished 7th grade, I preferred working in the woods and sending home money to the chores my old man would have given me had I stayed home -- clearing land. I guess about the first thing I did when I hit camp was look up the "walking delegate." He "packed the rigging," as they used to say -- and I joined the IWW. He was surprised, of course, guess no one that young had ever just walked up to him and asked to join before. But I remember what he said. "O.K. kid, that's what we've got to have, every working man in the country." So -- I gladly joined the I.W.W. (Wobblies) and remained with them until they had practically vanished from the scene. 'Course my father didn't like it one bit.

I got my first job in vaudeville and my first job in logging in the same year -- 1914. That was also the year I joined the IWW in the Minnesota woods. Four years before that, when I was just eleven, I saw someone playing a musical saw on a stage in Duluth and I fell in love with the sound and decided I would learn to play it. For two years there I played in vaudeville in the summer and worked in the woods in the winter. Then I left to go to Everett, Washington. All the lumberjacks were going west. They all said the same thing: there's lots of work out west and timber there will last forever. Well, forever is just about over now. Anyways, I just played saw on and off through the years in circus bands, vaudeville bands, dance bands. I worked solo sometimes, but the saw is not really a solo instrument. It's best accompanied by a piano. I also played with guitarists and banjo pickers. The working saw had its origin as a musical instrument about the time of the founding of the republic. It didn't got into decline until around 1921, when the Hawaiian steel guitar came in.

In the camps in those days we lived 150 men in a bunkhouse, ate in a dining room with tin plates nailed to the table. To wash dishes, they'd just take a wet rag and come down the line, swabbing out each plate. We worked ten hour days, six days a

week. On Sundays, we'd boil our clothes and just mope around camp. It was over 100 miles to town, there was just nowhere to go. I started as a swamper for one dollar a day. My job was to go ahead of the horse and cut the brush back to make way for the logging sled -- a two runner affair called a "go-devil." We worked all winter like that hauling logs to the river, staking them thirty feet high on a log-deck called a "roll-away." Come spring, we'd cut the wire holding it all together and the deck would come crashing down onto the ice. The log drive would be on . . . 150 miles to the mill at Cloquet. We'd ride them down, of course -- as it was the only practical way to do it. The river was moving slowly, except for sections of rapids. Those would be the bad ones. The logs would bump a rock on the bottom, hang up and go crossways -- we'd have to keep rolling them off the damn rocks and breaking jams. We'd use a cant hook with a four-foot handle, throw it over the log like a wrench on a nut. Falling was common, of course. Most of the greenhorns would take a dip in that icy water at least once a day. But not the old experienced river pigs, they'd hardly ever go in. Once in the water, you can't crawl up on the side of a log, 'cause it would keep rolling with you. So you'd have to go to the end -- and that's where the danger is. If another log comes up behind you... well you're a gone goose. They would kill up to 20 men on a river drive -- 20 out of 150. One that got hurt would be taken into town on a sleigh. The dead ones we'd plant on the river bank. Put a little cross up there and hang their cork shoes on it. But another river pig coming along would see those boots and take 'em.

My generation of "timber beasts" was the one historically slated to see the city of Cloquet, Minn. lose its title as "lumber capitol" of the U.S. by 1914 to Everett, Wash. By 1916, work was fading fast, and all the lumberjacks were going west as lake states men were in great demand. So I followed the procession and headed for Everett, Washington -- right at the top of the country figuring to work my way down. I came out with a partner in 1916 -- encouraged by my older sister Grace because tuberculosis was prevailing in the Upper Minnesota and Michigan Peninsular areas, and Grace was afraid I would contract it (because I was so scrawny),. We had money from working the drive so we came on the cushions -- paid our way on the Great Northern from Duluth, Minnesota. We wore our mackinaws and our shagged-off wool pants and rubbers. And we had our turkeys, a grain sack for our gear -- put a spud in one corner, tie a rope around it and sling it over your shoulder. So we got off the train at Everett, cold sober, bothering no one and two policemen walked up to us. They looked us over for a moment and asked, "Where you boys going?" My partner spoke up. "Downtown, nothing illegal about that, is there?" "No," says the cops. "But we got other ideas for you. Why don't you come on down with us to the station house?" They searched us there, and found our IWW books -- which was a ticket to get beat up. Next morning they marched us to the edge of town. "Seattle's that way," they said. "Just keep on walking." But we paid no attention.

We had arrived in a town that was under martial law. Weeks earlier, the local police had begun arresting IWW's for speaking on the street. There had been a general strike of the Shingle Weavers A.F.L. and the I.W.W. at the time and free speech had been banned. Well, the minute the organization heard about that, Wobblies began pouring into Everett to continue the campaign. Wobblies came from near and far just to "speak on the street." Of course they had to be arrested for such a heinous crime so the jails were full. In Seattle, the IWW chartered a ferry, the *Verona*, to take several hundred more members to Everett. But the local townspeople got alarmed, the Chamber of Commerce told them that thousands of us were coming to tear their town apart. So they got the National Guard out on the docks with machine guns. And as the tug came into port and began tying up at the pier in Everett, one trigger-happy soldier cut loose, then all of them began firing into the boatload of unarmed Wobblies -- killing six and wounding more than 100. We called it the "Everett Massacre," but the history books refer to it as "the Verona affair." Well -- it took this, and a lot more just to restore freedom of speech, supposedly guaranteed by the constitution! So much for relying on the constitution for your rights. The only sure way is to rely on your own organized might. Old Tom Jefferson said, "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

Violence, particularly organized vigilante action against us, was very common. I remember another

incident in 1919 in Centralia, Washington. The American Legion got a permit to parade down the main street, but instead went through a side alley where our hall was located. They were carrying lynch ropes, clubs, rifles and pistols. One of them shouted, "Let's go in and get the red bastards!" So they broke ranks and headed for the hall. Then a few Wobblies came out the front door -- and we had Winchester rifles too. But the legion wouldn't stop, so the Wobb's levered right into them -- killing four and wounding a bunch more. That night the lights mysteriously went out all over Centralia, and a group of vigilantes broke into the jail where the police had taken the IWW's. They got one man, Wesley Everett -- took him in a car where they worked him over with knives -- then drove to the Centralia River bridge. with the headlights shining on the bridge, they threw a rope over the railing and hung him there. Then they cut him down and hung Everett again -- riddling his body with rifle fire. There were a lot of vigilantes in the Northwest, mostly small businessmen. They would find a Wobbly and string him up, just like they were lynching Negroes in the South. They called us "UTEs" -- undesirable, transient elements. We were the footloose ones, the boomers, we moved around more lively. They make a gypsy out of you in lumber — there's always a mill going up and another shutting down. So you move, you find a new master: And when there's no work at all we'd get "dirt moving jobs" -- building roads. Lots of us would get into long shoring, construction, farm work -- any outdoor job. They'd all pay about the same, but I would always get back into logging. Work is work -- it's all the same to me. But I like the woods -- they're interesting, every day is different.

I was blacklisted in 1916 and that held until 1935, when the Wagner Act illegalized blacklists. At least it was supposed to. They still used them, but it had to be underground after that. If I worked in camps before that time, I'd be John Steele or John Boke or whatever; any name would do. I heard about the Bolshevik Revolution in a logging camp near what is now Valsetz, Oregon. It was 1917. Terrific arguments started every night in the bunkhouse. The chairman of the IWW would get up and open the meeting. He'd bang a work shoe on the table to get attention and say something like, "Gather round here, fellow workers. We've got a goddamn revolution to talk about." That chairman happened to be one of the pro-political faction, so he'd say, "The Russkies beat us to it and we've got to re-examine what we're doing and see where we're short. The fact is that they've done the trick and we're still talking." Then someone from the opposite side would grab him by the shirt and say, "Sit down, you Big Hoosier, you don't know what you're talking about." It was fast and furious. Generally, it'd break up with fist fights. I was only eighteen then and I'll tell you I was shy of those slab-sided lumberjacks. In those days I believed in the Debs dream, a socialist world without war or police. I still think it's going to take several generations to breed greed out of people. The only way that can be done is by changing the methods of production. The methods of production determine human nature in any country. You have a capitalist method in this country, and there's more at stake here than anywhere else. As a result you have the most savage ruling class in the world.

That savagery was obvious in the lumber camps. There were lots of accidents. In those days we clear-cut -- skinned it, took everything off. "Cut out and get out," we used to say. That wasn't right, but that don't mean that I agree with the Sierra Club and those environmentalists -- they're a bunch of nuts. I am all in accord with saving the timber -- but not an old dead tree that's over-ripe and should be out of there. Their idea is not to touch anything. And that would leave an over-ripe tree -- dead or dying (and trees rot from the top down). Then lightning comes along, strikes it and throws fire everywhere. One thing the environmentalists don't understand is that timber is a crop -- when it's ripe you harvest it. Nature does that -- just takes a hell of a lot longer. But I'll grant you, years ago they slaughtered right and left. The loggers had no power over it -- just cut what they told you or go down the line.

Anytime you work in the woods, it's dangerous. We handled the heaviest stuff in the world -- timber. Got any idea how much a tree weighs? And there we'd be, handling it with a steel donkey, slapping it about like it was a match. They killed a lot of men in the old days before we were organized. I worked for one camp that killed fifty-two men in one year. They also had the record for loading the most lumber in an eight-hour day -- sixty carloads of logs. But it took a man a week to do it.

I had seven major accidents which sent me to the hospital with broken arms, legs, and ribs. I also had a finger cut off in a rig. I fell headfirst toward the saw and had the choice to take it on the head or throw up a hand. I was in the hospital seven times in logging accidents. But the worst one I ever had was when a log rolled down a hill on me. Knocked me flat, rolled up chest high -- breaking four ribs and squeezed all my insides out my tail end. Laid out there for three hours till the others found me. Even then they had to get a log jack to get that thing off me. Now that was a bad one, let me tell you. My insides fell out of my tail end and hung way down to the tops of my cork shoes. Twenty years later I saw the nurse who took care of me. She was surprised to see me still alive and still working in a saw mill. She said the doctor had to stuff my intestines back in like they were rope, curling them and shoving them back up inside of me. After that log fell on me, I really didn't have the strength to work in the woods any more, so I became a pond monkey... taking it easy on the log pond. 'Course to a lot of guys, that's damn hard work, but like I tell them, there aren't any mountains on a log pond. You got to have balance on that job, 'cause you're working on some pretty small logs nowadays. Seems like the older I got, the smaller they got. It would always seem to me they would consider the direction of the average wind when building a pond. But they always seem to make them backwards, and the wind's forever blowing away from the mill. I've never seen it any other way.

Well, the Wobblies were concerned with safety issues. They led the fight against the brake block, which was particularly dangerous. It was outlawed. In the camps, the company was always figuring ways to use loggers against each other. They'd have a "bucking and falling board," with every name on it, and how many thousand feet each had produced. Naturally, it would keep all of us working against each other -- and for the same money. But when it came to laying off -- they'd go down the list. You had to work like hell to keep toward the top. It was always pushed on me to organize. The men would say, "let the kid do the talking, he's pretty well educated." That's a laugh -- all I had was eighth grade schooling. In my time, working class kids were lucky to finish grade school -- that's as far as their folks could afford to send them. Workers were notoriously poorly educated. Nowadays, working class kids go to college like everybody else -- where they get both educated and miseducated.

Conditions varied from camp to camp, but nothing would have changed if not for union activity. Still, nothing came easy. In 1919 we had a coast wide strike over the issue of showers, baths and blankets. Up to that time, we had to drag our blankets with us from camp to camp -- walking through towns like a bunch of pack mules. Men were carrying lice from one camp to the next. We would no sooner get a bunkhouse cleaned up, and here would come some logger with bad blankets. so we demanded that the company furnish clean bedding, twice a week like any civilized place. Naturally, they resisted it like hell -- and we refused to go to work. The companies started advertising for men. "Must have blankets," they said. so we got together five man committees which met every train, bus and boat. Anytime we saw a lumberjack come into town with blankets -- we'd pin his arms back, take 'em and burn 'em. You should have seen the faces on some of those guys. Finally we won -- and the companies had to hire a bedmaker, too. The food used to be pretty bad til we had two or three strikes about that. Later it became a tradition that you could get the best meal in the world in a logging camp. 'Course today, lumberjacks drive to work like everybody else. They want families, everybody wants to live at home. You couldn't afford to have a family in those days -- times made it that way.

There was a group in the IWW that we called the sabcats and the blackcats and names like that. They believed in wrecking machinery. We used to argue with them saying, "You guys are crazy. You're blowing up and destroying equipment we'll have to rebuild when we take over. We want to organize these workers, and take over the means of production, not destroy them."

Your people of today think corruption is a new phenomenon in unions, but the leaders of labor have always served as lieutenants of the capitalist class within the ranks of the workers. You pay a union officer seventy-five thousand or more a year, and he's going to look after his own best interests and those of the stockholders of the companies he's involved with. As far as the AF of L goes, in the old

days, they told us: a fair day's wage for a fair day's work. The IWW countered: organize the working class to take over the means of production and create a new society in the shell of the old. The AF of L wanted no part of that proposition, I can tell you. We used to call Gompers, "old Sell'em Out Sam."

In my estimation, the best tactic that came out of the IWW was slowing production. That brought bosses to their knees quicker than anything else. General strikes were effective, too. We had an important one in 1917 that spread up and down the Pacific Coast. I was in Seattle then and we would get calls for help. Twnety-five of us would load into cars and go strengthen a picket line in some other town. We were roving pickets. In that era, it was more or less a movement of single men. The big demand we won was the eight-hour day. The Knights of Labor had failed to get it and so had the AF of L. Oh, the owners tried to stop us anyway they could. They created a spruce division in the army. They'd draft a logger, maybe he was a bucker or a faller, and they'd put him in the woods to work alongside a man who was getting civilian pay. The civilian was drawing ten to fifteen dollars a day and the poor devil from the army was getting thirty dollars a month.

The reaction to the IWW was mixed. Some workers wanted to hang on to the old, fearful of any change because one crumb was better than none at all -- the conservative element which you've always got. But others were more interested in getting out and doing something. I remember how disgusted I would get sometimes. The camp always had a table with magazines and reading material. So I would come in from town with Wobbly papers and lay them down. Then the stiffs would come in -- and look very carefully around till they found a *Police Gazette.* It was disgusting. There were camps that were 100% Wobbly -- from the foreman on down. A new man would come into camp -- not knowing, of course. And the bullbuck would come up to him. "I'll bet you're one of those IWW's." "Oh no," the logger would say, "Not me -- I'd never join that outfit.""Well, then get out of here," the bullbuck would growl. "This camp's organized." But then they had what was called "4-L camps" -- The Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen. They were organized by the companies and the government to insure production during the war. We'd call them "long, lean, lousy lumberjacks." I worked in them too. And like you'd expect, the pay was worse and so were the conditions. I got run out of some camps too. One company was a particularly hard nut to crack -- only had three IWW's there at the time. So I thought I would try it. But the "bull of the woods" run me off with a double bitted axe. "We ain't going to have no red bastards in this camp," he yelled. Later, however, we had it organized.

The next lumber capitol after Everett was Tacoma, Wash., and then in rapid succession Grays Harbor Wash. area, Portland, Eugene, and Roseburg, Ore. By the time of the Russian Revolution in November 1917, I was 18 years old and was setting chokers in the logging camp of the Siletz Lumber and Logging Co. near Independence, Oregon (now a town called Valsetz). People were starting to take more of an interest in organizing after that Revolution was announced, and that was about the time that the Wobblies were at their peak. People will ask how we signed men into the IWW. Well, in those days, we'd put it to them cold. We were a revolutionary organization of labor, dedicated to the taking over of the means of production and building a new society within the shell of the old. We didn't pull any punches. We couldn't offer much in those days. Nothing we used to say, but a chance to fight for better conditions of labor. There's two kinds of unions, those that are operated as business and others that are run for the benefit of the members. One thing that must be said for the IWW is that it was a clean organization. There was only one paid officer in the whole outfit -- the General Secretary. And all he got was four bits an hour, same as on the job. We had no war chest, no money in reserve. when we had a strike, all we could do was solicit funds. And the dues were very low. You paid the traveling organizer when he came around camp. He'd ask, "Fellow worker, are your dues stamped up?" And you'd show him your book and say, "while you're at it, stamp me ahead a few months." We had no piecards, no paid officials -- none of that stuff.

When we hit town, the best bet was to go down to the private employment office. All the jobs would be written down -- one chokersetter, one sawyer, one edgerman. We would have to buy the jobs, cost one day's pay. Then we'd go through another

hurdle -- the loggers hiring hall -- set up by the employers. You'd give them your name and they would run down a card index file. If they found you they'd say, "sorry, can't send you out." Blacklisted! 'Course it didn't stop us, 'cause we'd go out on a phony name. They didn't have Social Security or identification in those days. I had a regular name -- but I didnt dare go out on it. So I would have a whole list of other "working" names to use.

By 1927 I was a scaler in a sawmill on the Columbia River at St. Helens, Oregon. I didn't get married till 1927. When I finally did, I got a lot of kidding about it from friends. But I figured I had as much right to starve a wife and a bunch of kids as the next man (nearly did, too). Dixie and I first lived in St. Helens, Columbia County, Oregon. That mill went broke, so I got a job bucking logs at Buster Creek on the lower Columbia river. I moved the family to Battleground, Washington (to the home of Dixie's parents) where they stayed while I was on the road working.

I saw my first copy of the "Daily Worker" there, the Central organ of the communist party. It was printed in Chicago, and was an illegal paper as the party was illegal at the time. The paper was mailed in long envelopes and was printed on thin paper. After Buster Creek shut down I got a job on a "splash drive" for the Wind River Lumber Company near Carson, Washington (upper columbia river). That was only a short job, so when it was done I got a river pig job, which is driving logs down the Clearwater river in 1928 for the big new Weyerhauser mill at Lewiston, Idaho. This was to be my last experience as a river pig, as log drives were going out in favor of railroad and truck haul. On this last log drive I met many river pigs from Minn. who I knew back there in 1914-1915 before I came west. Came 1929 and I was spare setter, and dogger in sawmills of Weyerhauser Timber Co. at Snoqualmie Falls, Wash. (East of Seattle). Of my three kids, TJ was born in 1929 in Battleground at Dixie's folks' home. In that same year came also the great depression. During the depression years from 1930 until 1937 -- times I hate to remember -- I was on and off the W.P.A. A logging camp job would open up and they would put on only a rigging crew who would deck logs at a spar tree, then after a week -- shut down. Then they would hire a loading crew and load light when they had orders. So -- back to town, apply for W.P.A. get turned down because too many ahead of you, Get a committee from Workers Alliance and go after the welfare set-up. Stay on until a job opened and then repeat the process. I moved my family to the Seattle area about 1930 while working at Weyerhauser, where the other three kids were born. We stayed and starved in the area until 1935. During the next year, we lived in Auburn (King County), and Pacific City.

In 1937 I heard about some pine outfits starting up in central Washington, around Chelan, Wash. I threw the cork shoes and my working gear in the old model T and took off for Chelan. Having been a "pine cat" I soon had a job cutting logs and piling brush for a small pine outfit north of Chelan near Pateros, Wash. And, by my leaving, the wife and kids could draw my rations on welfare until I got a payday. A ration was $1.20 per week, per person. After two months work, I was able to move the family over there. So, in 1937, I moved the family to Methow, on the edge of Okanagan National Forest in Okanagan County.

During my second year there, my wife died from strep throat. At that time I had three boys, aged three to 9 and a baby girl aged two. Hired a housekeeper. Next it was rumored that a bunch of local women were seeking a court order to turn the kids over to custody of the court. Bundled the kids up, took them to Seattle, and put them into a children's home so I could get them out if -- and when. The women figured I couldn't raise the kids alone, but I thought differently. The REAL reason on the part of the women was that I had tried to organize the camp into the C.I.O Woodworkers union. "Ben" (Herbert Benjamin) (who had a disabled arm) went to an orthopedic hospital in Seattle. Robert and "TJ" went to Washington Children's Home, also in Seattle. Grace lived with a relative for a little over a year.

I hung around Seattle cutting wood, putting wood and coal into basements, clearing vacant lots for realtors etc., logging when I could until 1939. Went to Bend, Ore, "home" where Dad was employed as edgerman. No work there so went to Sisters, 22 miles north of Bend, Oregon.. Arrived in time to see two men load the dogger out of the mill. He got his arm slashed on the hook dog, so I got the dogging

job. He came back in ten days, so I got the pond monkey job. I met Mary Martin in White Salmon (just over the border from Hood River, Oregon), Washington. Hired her as my live-in housekeeper. Married Mary in 1940 in Madras, and returned to Sisters. In Sisters in the spring of 1940, I sent for my kids. Worked in Sisters four years and in 1943 they moved the mill to Redmond, Ore. I had bought a lot and built a shack at Sisters so I sold that and moved to Redmond to build again.

Settled down to work in the new mill at Redmond, and the boys had elected me the V. Pres. of the local, as well as shop steward, or "Jaw Smith" as the Wobblies would say. The following might be called "mill town politics". The war was on by that time and the C.I.O. had a policy of creating a P.A.C. in all locals. The policy of the Communist party was similar so I made the motion in our Redmond local to set up a P.A.C. and it passed. Following the union meeting, the new P.A.C. met and decided to visit the A.F.L. carpenters and we got ten minutes on the floor and we told them we wanted a member of carpenters to file for a city council job as building inspector. They agreed and elected a three man committee to meet with us. Next nght we repeated the process at the A.F.L. painters. Next move was to try and get the Grange to go along, but they voted it down. So--we organized a local of Farmers Union, (still in business by 1966). Most of the Farmers union members were also grange members so they easily brought the Grange into our "Redmond Union Council." The Union council put up four candidates for election to city council and we elected them all. Later on the State Council of Carpenters ordered Redmond local to stop co-operating with C.I.O. as did the painters. However it was too late as the election was over, and we had won. While we tried to keep the union council alive, it died off after the A.F.L. pull-out, but many rank and filers gave continuing support to our efforts as they had learned about "unity from below." During the economic slump before the Korean war, Redmond got new sidewalks, curbs, and several other projects because of the progressive nature of its city Gov't.

I was known as "the only Communist in town," and was a leader of the progressive block in the C.I.O. so naturally, someone turned me in to the International Board of the Union. One night our local was visited by the whole International Board. They had come down to purge the local of "communists" in official jobs in the union. After a lot of red baiting speeches by board members I got the floor and offered to resign. The local by a roaring voice vote shouted the idea down and insisted I remain an officer, and this I did until I quit 2 years later. Before I had quit I was elected delegate to International Convention of I.W.A. at Vancouver, B.C. then as delegate to State C.I.O convention at Roseburg, Oregon.

After seven years in the sawmills at Redmond-Sisters Ore., and at the end of World War II, my son TJ went out on his own; we decided to work together on a portable sawmill. I started up a portable mill of my own, and took a contract to build another mill at La Pine, Ore. I got the mill to sign a contract with the union. I had shut the mill construction down in order to hear a union organizer. Lost the mill building contract, and moved my portable to Chemult, Ore. Went bankrupt. Started up a lath mill in my spare time while working on the river for Shevlin-Hixon Co. at Bend, Ore. Moved lath mill to Elkton, Ore. and set up to saw handle squares and lath from sawmill waste. Three years of this and the mill burned down, so, back on a log pond at Burney, Calif. They shut down. Went to Arcata, Calif. -- shut down -- thence in 1956-57 worked on a log pond as a pond monkey at Piercey, California with my son Bob at Dimmick's Lumber Company; then in 1957 to Fort Seward, California, a small lumber town in Southern Humboldt County, California. Last lumber capitol was the Eureka, Arcata area. I saw them all with the exception of Saginaw, Bay City, Mich. and Bangor, Maine.

Then came the big lumber slump in 1957-58. Came October of 1957 with the mills still shut down with thousands of workers unemployed. Many had exhausted their unemployment benefits and were being told at the welfare "no help for able bodied unemployed." I had been denied unemployment comp. because of their wrong ruling "quit without good cause," and with the help of two lumber unions I had reversed the ruling and won the case. This established a precedent for labor on what constitutes "good cause." So, on my first pay on unemployment comp I got a check for $250 and went to an office supply store and bought a used

mimeo, an old 1917 A.B. Dick (which I used the rest of my life). Also bought stencils, paper, typewriter, corrective fluid, and ink, and then I thought I would by God show 'em. When I showed up at Fort Seward with all that gear my son Ben, who had been employed there said "My God, Dad what you gonna do with all that stuff?" "Well, Ben, I'm gonna start a S.O.B. of a newspaper. THATS what I'm gonna do." That was the start of the lumberjack news which ran for 7 years.

[Family members recall that Tom worked on a log ponds at Lake Tahoe in 1959, and also at Round Valley – just outside of Ukiah, California.] After Fort Seward and Eureka, I moved to Davenport in the mid-1960s. In 1965 I was laid off my last job at the reluctance of the insurance carriers to cover older workers. After that, I lived in Santa Cruz with my wife Mary. I continued in logging until 1967; that's about fifty-three years total.

In the course of 53 years lumber work I've done everything but climb. Have been river pig, rafter, boom man, loader, choker setter, bucker, faller, setter, sawyer, dogger, edgerman and trimmer man. After some 53 years work in lumber industry, I was retired as too old to work, in 1967 at age 68. Now this forced retirement caused me to attempt a come-back on an old skill I had acquired in 1910 -- playing a musical saw. Advancing musical saw technology had left the poor old musical saw far behind. Well, I failed to bring the saw back but did manage to reach the top -- again on that great old time dance band instrument. I'm still playing it. I'm pretty near eighty years old, so I ain't got a lot of strength left. Mostly I play for labor rallies, picket lines, and protest meetings of one kind or another.

After his retirement, Tom became a traveling musical saw player of note and a full-time labor movement activist. Because he had been active in the IWW movement, Tom was featured in the documentary film "The Wobblies." He is full of memories about the IWW: "The IWW did achieve some victories -- to their eternal credit. We got the eight hour day, clean camp conditions, clean sheets, limit of men in a bunkhouse, electric lights -- the kind of conveniences we never dreamed of before. But by 1919, the organization was deeply divided -- whether or not to take political actions and support the Russian Revolution. A lot of Wobblies wouldn't even support Eugene Debs. They said he was just another politician -- even though he was one of their own. They hardly understood that everything they had been doing was political activity. A lot of people think the IWW was destroyed by terror. But that wasn't true. Every time we were attacked, we grew. It disintegrated because of political divisions. I stayed in 'til 1923, when I couldn't even find anyone to pay dues to. By 1924 I was out. Today I have no earthly use for the IWW. After the IWW I joined the American Communist Party. I stayed until the middle 1940's. I would say that pursuing the IWW line now would be an exercise in futility, because half of the battle is won: the building of industrial unions. Now that we have them, let's repair them. But in the old days the IWW was the most relevant union, the most militant. We got results. And we had fun. We had little two-by-four-inch stickers gummed on the back that you wet and put up. One read, "Trust in the Lord and sleep in the street." Another was "Jesus saves the willing slaves." People were afraid of us, because they figured we were a bunch of roughnecks. "I Won't Works," "I Want Whisky," and all that. One thing was true: we wouldn't work unless we got decent treatment."

Here in Santa Cruz, some people are erecting a statute of me playing the musical saw. There's been quite a hassle about it in the city council and in the papers, but they finally got permission to put it up in the mall opposite the town clock. Ordinarily, a statute would show a man on a horse with a sword drawn ready to kill some s.o.b. Mine shows a man playing a musical saw. That bronze is supposed to last five thousand years. I can just visualize someone in the future asking: "What is that man doing?" Well, he's playing a musical saw." "What's a saw?" "That's something you cut wood with." "What's wood?"

Another unusual thing is that everyone knows that I'm an avowed communist, and those who are avowed are the worst kind. Of course, the winds of political change could blow and that statute could go to the city dump. I can't worry about that. I'm still playing the old songs and campaigning to make the musical saw popular again. I don't know

how far I'm going to get, but I'll play for as long as my health and time permit. I'm going to cut a record in Hollywood and make a movie in Santa Monica. After that I can get back to the job of overthrowing the government. I'll keep reminding people that Thomas Jefferson said we should have a revolution every twenty years or so and that Henry Wallace said this is the country of the common man. So perchance if you are around Santa Cruz you will see a statue of a man wearing a derby hat and playing the musical saw in one hand and holding the Communist Manifesto in the other. That will be me--Tom Scribner."

Tom lived with Mary in an old frame house just a few yards from the traffic of Highway 1. Their living room was adorned with the fading photographs of his grandfather in Civil War blue, his lumberman father, and his three sons -- who worked in the woods, as well as his daughter who lived in Oregon with her own family. Mary's last words to Tom were "keep playing that saw, dad." True to his instructions, after Mary died, Tom moved to the St. George Hotel in downtown Santa Cruz -- a formerly nice hotel that had become a flop-house -- and Tom became locally known as "the saw freak" -- the old man in the brown derby hat, red socks and the wide, wrinkled grin. Tom Scribner played his chosen instrument, the musical saw, on the local pizza parlor/college campus circuit from Monterey to Mendocino -- with guest appearances in Seattle, Denver, and Chicago. Because of his unparalleled skill as a saw player, he also appeared on recordings with Neil Young and George Harrison of 'Beatles' fame. He was a celebrity on several TV documentaries about his saw, including the CBS News Production of "On the Road" with Charles Kurault. He made almost daily appearances as a street musician in front of the St. George Hotel playing his saw for passers-by.

A bronze statue of Tom playing the musical saw now sits in downtown Santa Cruz, California at the old St. George Hotel site where Tom used to play. Tom died of respiratory failure and complications due to pancreatic cancer, at Dominican Hospital, Santa Cruz, California in 1982. His ashes were scattered at sea, and instead of a memorial service, local admirers organized a parade in his honor in Santa Cruz.