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ANDY ANDERSON: THE ONE-ARMED PROSPECTOR by Jane Gaffin

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Every winter afternoon the indomitable one-armed prospector would walk from his home on Black Street to the Travelodge to drink coffee, read his mining newspapers, jot notes or chat with friends.

The late Andy Anderson had experienced 22 skin-of-the-teeth incidents in his 69 years. And one afternoon in February, 1976, he generously shared some of those anecdotal misadventures which otherwise would have died in the dustbin of antiquity.

Although his passion for rocks and prospecting dated back to his youth, he never caught the fever for gold or any mineral. "I just want to know how minerals exist in relation to other minerals around them," he began.

"Prospecting places me in the environment to learn about life and our relation to the earth and universe. I find something interesting everyday in the field. I'm building theories all the time. I have lots of fun."

Anderson talked about minerals and metals in an industrial context like other mining people, of course. But he also viewed the Earth's bounty from the perspective of being absolutely vital as nutrients to sustain a healthy body.

Humans and other animals need daily intakes in various proportions of such minerals as calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, iron, copper, molybdenum, manganese, zinc, chromium, selenium, nickel and vanadium.

Since the 1930s, Anderson had prospected many parts of Canada and eked out a good living finding significant mineral showings and selling properties.

He once staked a fluorspar property in northern British Columbia and sold it for cash to Conwest Explorations in 1954. "If the deposit goes into production, I'm entitled to nothing more," he added.

A year previously, he had sold a nickel-copper property over the phone in three minutes to a buyer he knew. "The next morning \$4,000 was in the bank."

A deposit must be big and rich to pay to be a mine, he noted. "If you've got a mine, maybe you'll get paid earlier. There's several ways to get paid off. Cash, stocks, royalties."

To Anderson, cash was king. He wouldn't deal with stock. "It could be 10 years before stock is released. Many things can happen to you in that time."

Anderson anticipated the snow vanishing in the spring so he could work his three copper-zinc-silver claims he'd staked in the Whitehorse mining district.

He also toyed with the idea of hunting for tin in the Dawson City area, where he had once mined \$900 worth of gold in a year when the precious yellow metal was worth only \$36 an ounce.

Despite his accident that rendered him without an arm, Anderson preferred going to the bush alone. He had his own ways of doing things, regardless that it might take all day to dig a hole on a placer prospect instead of an hour.

Anderson never liked discussing details of the fateful day when his right arm was severed at the shoulder. He was 54 years old then and had taken full responsibility for what happened. He had continued his lifestyle with stubborn determination.

On July 22, 1961, he had arrived back in Whitehorse after a bush outing with the late Larry Patnode. The engine of the Cessna 180 was still running as pilot Jim Thatcher guided the float plane into the dock on the Yukon River near the White Pass depot.

Friends described Anderson as a "busy-busy, go-go fellow, always impatient to get where he was going and to get things done." He had unlatched the passenger door and was treading along the float toward the nose of the plane.

His intention was to grab the rope used to pull the aircraft into the dock. He moved too far forward and walked into the invisible whirl of the propeller. It hurled him into the river.

Patnode, whose car was parked at the dock, hurried to the hospital on the other side of the river to summons Dr. Jack Hibbard and the ambulance.

In a few minutes, the doctor was on the scene where Thatcher was holding a pressure point to keep blood from pumping out with every heart beat.

"Gee, Larry," Anderson addressed his mining pal. "That was a stupid thing to do. Give me a cigarette."

The next day, propped up in a hospital bed, Anderson wrote a full-page letter to his parents. "There was no better time to learn to use my left hand," he said.

After the accident, he left the territory temporarily. He wanted to try new things to prove to himself he could still function with only one arm. He did fine. It just took longer to accomplish a project with one arm than when he had two.

He did have to make one change. In June, 1968, he discovered he was not cut out to be a southpaw shooter. It took several shots to bring down a grizzly bear that refused to be deterred by a warning shot. The animal fell at Anderson's feet. He sold the handgun and bought a rifle, which was easier to handle with accuracy.

Only once did he recall being really distressed by circumstances. Some years after losing his arm, he was a passenger in a vehicle that sped off the road at 70 miles per hour. Anderson

escaped with a broken left wrist.

"Things got discouraging with no right arm and no use of my left wrist. I had to cook for myself, get dressed and get into and out of bed. But I made it," said Anderson, whose given names were Theodore Henrik.

He was named for the United States President of the day, Theodore (Teddy) Roosevelt. Henrik was for his father, a Norwegian born on a Minnesota farm. His mother was born in what is now Oslo, Norway.

The parents had immigrated in a covered wagon to homestead in Alberta where young Anderson was born in 1907. He had two older sisters and a younger one.

When he was eight years old, Anderson found an 1898 book titled Klondike in an old building being demolished on the homestead. After reading the vintage book, he repeatedly announced to his mother he was going to the Yukon.

True to his word, the 17-year-old experienced a freezing boxcar ride from Edmonton to Vancouver in May of 1924 as he began working his way north.

Following a 1927 road-building job near Prince George, British Columbia, he hopped a boat at Prince Rupert up the coast to Alaska. From Skagway, he prospected his way for a week over the White Pass. He entered the Yukon on May 1, 1927.

Over the years, he had lots of prospecting adventures which were interrupted occasionally to take jobs for wages to support his rockhounding habit.

But Anderson was too independent and private to accept the federal government's offer to subsidize prospectors for up to \$900 a year.

"I don't like assistance," he stressed. "You have to honestly state everything you do. Information becomes accessible to other prospectors and mining companies. I couldn't be dishonest about what I write. It doesn't suit me to reveal business. Therefore, I foot my own bills."

In the early 1930s, the Carmacks area, 100 miles north of Whitehorse, attracted his attention. Only a dog team kept him company while he searched for mineralization around Mt. Freegold.

One cold winter day, coming out of Carmacks, he gave an elderly fellow a ride on the toboggan pulled behind the dog sled.

Bill Langham, about 75, had a bedroll and supplies. But he was not physically well. A while later, he went missing when returning for more supplies. A lengthy search failed to find any trace of him. His disappearance is one of those great unsolved mysteries of the Yukon.

On December 29, 1946, Anderson was mushing his dogs from the south fork of the Stewart River into the Mayo district. It was cold.

Without a thermometer, he didn't know until he reached town on January 19 of the next year that the temperature had plummeted to around a record low. (The official record-breaker of minus 80 degrees F. was set a few weeks later on February 3, 1947. See The Yukoner

Magazine, Issue No. 17.)

"I had to break trail all the way to Mayo for my dogs because the snow was too deep for them to pull through. I'd go out about 10 miles on snowshoes, stop for tea, then go back for the dogs. I kept this up for three weeks when normally it would have been a week's trip in."

Anderson did a stint with the Army Engineers in construction and road-building then returned to Mayo to run the Silver King Hotel from 1948 to 1949.

For about a year, he was manager, bartender, cook, housekeeper. "I did everything for four people," he reminisced. "I was tied to the hotel and dying on my feet from lack of fresh air. All that dust in the rooms. I had to quit. It was suicide. And I don't believe in any kind of suicide."

On the first day of 1950, his replacement took over. Anderson flew to Whitehorse to outfit.

He liked freelance prospecting better than anything else. But, like all people who try to do things on their own, they eventually find out what Anderson did.

"Sometimes you have to work or starve to death," he advised.

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