

Bill Boardman

Hello everyone and welcome to the third A.G.M. of the Western Fallers Association and thank you all for showing up. You'll see me reading from notes today because unlike our president I am not a professionally trained public speaker so I'll stumble along the best I can and you'll have to bear with me. Mike asked me to speak today on the death of Ted Gramlich and what I thought some of the contributing factors might have been. After much thought I agreed to give it a try as this is something very close to my heart, and I've been thinking about it daily since it happened. I went to the accident site with Don Coulombe and John Knowles and we packed Ted's saw, hardhat, and gas jugs off the hill, I took some pictures of the tree's and stumps to try to get a feel for what I think might have happened.

How and why did Ted die? The how we'll get to in a few minutes, as for the why, do you want the short version or the long version? Today you get a deal; I'm going to give you both. The short version is this: Ted died because of Corporate and Personal Greed.

There are so many things wrong with Ted's death that I'm not even sure where to begin on the long version. Ted died because there was a complete breakdown in a system that a few years ago was in place and taken for granted, and that system is no longer there. Everyone is bailing off the liability/responsibility wagon, we have the President of TimberWest, Paul McElligott stating in the Vancouver Sun that he accepts no responsibility for this accident because TimberWest doesn't have any employees working in the forestry sector, it almost sounds like he's bragging about that fact. Well if that's the case, and everything is contracted out, then what do we need the middleman for, we should all contract directly from the government and get rid of these corporations that want to siphon off an ever increasing amount of profit, and by their own admission, accept none of the responsibility or liability that should go with it. Paul McElligott is also on record stating, "this fallers death is a tragedy," he didn't even know Ted's name, and I would wager that the real tragedy for Mr. McElligott is that the accident happened on his Company Property and shoved his Company name into the limelight. On that same note we're all aware of these cute little catch phrases that keep going around, "unsafe is unacceptable", "safety 1st", of course the operative unspoken part of that one is, "safety 1st unless it interferes with production", and my personal favorite, "zero tolerance because every accident is preventable". They are right, when I look back at my 36 year career and the accidents I've had, I could have prevented every one of them by staying home in bed. If I hadn't of got into that helicopter on Aug. 09th/1991 I wouldn't have crashed and rolled down the mountain and got all smashed to hell, but the good news from that incident, after fighting with the compo board for 7 years, was I learned that I'm so vastly improved after rehab that by their reckoning, if I have an accident like that every 10 or 15 years I could possibly live forever. There's no such thing as an accident, only some deskbound pencil pushing dickhead could ever dream up or verbalize that thought. I'd like to drag that person around behind me for a day, don't try and do the job, just walk everywhere I walk for the whole day, and then do that every day for a month, and then do that every year for 36 years and let's see that person come through unscathed, and remember, I'm not talking about doing the job, just walk everywhere I walk every hour of the day in the heat and the rain and the snow and the unforgiving terrain and if you're still standing 36 years later, look me in the eye and tell me there's no such thing as an accident.

The system I spoke of that is no longer in place was largely there because of the I.W.A. Union and its membership, don't ever think for a moment that corporations or companies have a conscience or any morality as we view those things from a human perspective. By their very definition they are in existence to generate money for stockholders and their own hierarchy of employees and they can best be compared to human psychopaths as they rip and tear their way through life using any and all means to meet that all important objective, to generate more money than they did in the last quarter, or the last year, and the sad fact is, corporate greed is a black hole that all the money in the world will never fill, no matter how much they make, it will never be enough.

One of the way's you increase profits is to cut costs and you can cut those costs in many different areas but some of the ones that directly effect us as independent fallers are wages, lengths of shifts, safety protocols, working conditions, living conditions, forms of transportation and rolling the clock

back to 1972 and putting fallers back on piece work which is what paying by the acre is, that's just a few, if you want a more complete list, read our 60 page report.

As I'm sure you're all aware and has been publicly stated these companies have no employees, everything is contracted out, and our union is, according to the President of the United Steel Workers Local 2171 Darrell Wong, as of our last A.G.M. a year ago, constitutionally unable to defend the rights of companies, just individuals. Their more than happy to sign up your limited company and take your money for monthly dues and as a matter of fact, you can't work on a lot of jobs if your not in the union, but when you have a problem on the job they can't do a damn thing for you, I have their assurance that they'd like to, it's just not in the constitution. Now the problem I have with that, is I'm getting to be an old dog and my memory isn't what it used to be, but I've been running my company since 1978 and I first met Darrel Wong in the early 80's in Mahatta River and since then over the years we've touched on this subject several times, and I always got the same answer, we'd like to help, or we're working on it, but we're going to have to rewrite the constitution of the Union. Well, that must be one hell of a rewrite, because I've been hearing that for going on 20 years and in that same time frame, our mostly hypocritical, lying, corrupt federal leaders rewrote the constitution of the entire country. Maybe the union should consider contracting the job out, might even save some money and if something turns out to be wrong later they can claim no responsibility or liability.

How does all of this relate to Ted's death? When these Companies in their lust for more profit got rid of their Union employees and contracted everything out it's been a race to the bottom and don't kid yourself, the race has just started. Cut every cost you can find, put everything up for bid and take the cheapest one on the table because their not our employees, and so we're not liable, and that led directly to men working in heli-blocks with no pads in them, and a minimum 30 minute hike from the 1st aid attendant to where Ted was hurt, and the next guy on the other side was 45 minutes away, he was also a 20 minute walk down a deactivated logging road to where he started hiking downhill at least another 15 minutes to his saw. For the contractor to say he had a helicopter on standby is, and was, little comfort when there are no pads to land on and move men and 1st Aid equipment where they were needed, the only benefit of the helicopter was to long line Ted's dead body out of the bush.

The next factor in Ted's death was personal greed on the part of the contractor, bid it low to get the job, and if anyone doesn't like it run them off because the union, if their even in it, can't do squat for them anyhow. There are good and bad contractors, but the good ones are going to get squeezed out if we as fallers continue to go to work for less than we know we should, in conditions that should be unacceptable under any circumstances, but we've all done it because life's responsibilities and financial obligations sometimes override intelligence, pride and common-sense. I've talked to some of these contractors over the years, who interestingly enough have never once admitted to ever making any money, and asked them why they can't pay a decent wage and the standard answer is they had to bid it low to get the contract and if they didn't do it someone else would. Well, it's one of God's unwritten rules that there has to be one asshole on every crew and if you're ever on a crew and you can't figure out who it is, then within that particular group, it's probably you. If you're always the lowest bidding contractor it's not someone else winning the race to the bottom, it's time to look in the mirror and realize it's you, you're the one lowering the playing field for all the rest of us, and it's up to us as independents to say no, I'm worth more than that, and not go to work for these bottom feeders. If we as independents stood together we could raise the price for our services and improve our conditions and all we'd have to do is not cut any timber for a couple of months. If we do nothing else lets leave here today with the agreement that we have a set manday rate that's the minimum required, that unsafe truly is unacceptable, and learn to say no and mean it, and if the union or the compo board don't back you up, as usual, phone Wendy Gaskill and we'll start to document these cases ourselves because at the end of the day I believe that's whose going to go to bat for us, this association, our own association. We've been killing the same number of people on average for about 75 years and nothing was ever done about it, so what changed? We live in an age of communication and B.C.'s dirty little secret got some bad P.R. thanks mainly to Gordon Hamilton from the Vancouver Sun to whom I think this organization and all of us really, owe a huge Thank You, for his interest, diligence, and integrity in the articles he wrote on our behalf, he gave us a voice out of the wilderness. I found it interesting to see all the maneuvering that went on when the public woke up, with all the conferences, press releases and summit meetings.

When the C.E.O.'s of the large Companies met and issued their press release, that was nothing more than damage control, to try and downplay Mr. McElligotts faux pau of stating in print that they accept no liability or responsibility. Wouldn't you just love to have listened in on that meeting, you know they all think that way, but it's either incredibly stupid, or unbelievably arrogant, to say it out loud, especially to a reporter, well done Mr. McElligott.

Another contributing factor in Ted's death was a lack of supervision, certainly on a personal level, and I'm betting on a corporate level as well. Show me the paper trail, because whenever I was in charge of crews, I did weekly inspections on every man and filed the reports, it goes with the territory, and that was years ago, so show us some paper from TimberWests Contract Supervisor and from Brock Brown or his Bull Bucker to make sure that due diligence was being observed, but I know from going to the accident site that on a Bullbucking level it wasn't. Ted was a friend of mine and even if he wasn't, I still wouldn't be here to speak ill of the dead, but I will speak the truth of what I saw on the hill. The three of us couldn't find a good stump anywhere in Ted's quarter the day we went there, and it pains me to say that, but whatever was going on in Ted's mind someone should have caught that, and made him straighten up, because he certainly had the ability. The issue here with me isn't to deny that Ted might have made a mistake, or was overusing Dutchman's, or cutting off holding wood to swing tree's, or anything else you could dream up, the issue, was that when he was hurt, the system that should have been in place, that we, as either Independents or union workers have every right to expect, wasn't there, to give him a fighting chance for his life, and he died because of that.

In my mind the only organization that can mandate the kind of change we need to see is the W.C.B. or whatever the hell their calling themselves these days, but in my experience their in bed with industry, not with a few thousand Independent workers. In 27 years of falling I've seen a field inspector twice and the last time about 6 or 7 years ago Gary Brenton and I both got written up by an Inspector named Bruce Dumont because we were on either side of a fire break and could hear each others saw's and we had radio contact but we weren't within line of site. Nowadays we're working 30 to 45 minutes apart in single man blocks where you never see anyone all day and nobody say's a word, what happened, did the page with that regulation written on it fall out of the book, or did the companies tell Compo, forget that regulation, this is how we need it to work today, when did the tail start wagging the dog? Or did it always and will it continue to do so? Thank You