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Autobiography & Memoir

Walking Tractor and Other Tales of the Old Anderson Valley
Bruce Patterson
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For the author, the lush Redwood country of California's Anderson Valley gave him a sense of purpose, a reverence for nature, and a pride in accomplishment that neither his childhood on the poor side of Los Angeles nor the Vietnam War could. These twenty-five stories offer glimpses into his physically exhausting work as a logger, woodcutter, and farmer, which he did for thirty years. To carve out a meaningful life, all Valley workers had to be like the lumberjack—"a fighter living out his woodsmen's dreams by grabbing life by the ass and never giving an inch."

Patterson's vivid stories brim with such colorful "fighters" as Billy Bones, a hermit-like eccentric with "pre-industrial hygiene," more Gollum than man, and Lester Seymour, a famous "catskinner" (bulldozer operator) who taught the twenty-five-year-old Patterson how to survive as a lumberjack. Most of the stories are about workers in the Anderson Valley, but some tall tales are included that feature talking crows, Bigfoot, and horses that converse with each other but "don't speak American."

Pride in one's work is a recurrent theme throughout, and the title story, as well as "Stomping Fleece" and "Slinging Steel" show that satisfaction in a job well done compensates for a life of hard work in which the poor stay poor. At times, the author includes too much detail about the technicalities of his jobs, (readers will need to consult the useful glossary frequently). However, Patterson's colorful tales offer an array of unique personalities and animals, especially horses and sheep, making this collection a delight. Readers will look forward to his planned autobiographical novel about his childhood and Vietnam service. In real life, Patterson was a civil rights worker in the 1960s and, along with Ron Kovic, founded the Los Angeles chapter of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. For twenty years he was a columnist for the *Anderson Valley Advertiser*.

The author has an excellent talent for sharing the harshness and happiness of his life through his text. Although he chooses to say little about Vietnam, Patterson allows the reader a sense of how he achieved healing through his work and his love and respect for the people in his

life. His macho but often sensitive stories hint at a man whose love of nature—rekindled after becoming immune to it in a Vietnam riddled by bombs and burned-out villages—brought him to a time and place where he thought he “saw into a soul of a deer.”

Karl Helicher