

I think many youngsters used to believe the rotund woodsman was one of Santa Claus' helpers because he always appeared before Christmas with the tree.

In the last two years Fritz Trachsel hasn't shown up with his usual consignment of trees. He was imprisoned (and for this tough wiry outdoorsman, that's the right word) in hospital. Last winter it was with a broken shoulder blade and collar-bone; the year before a broken back. The year before that he received a bunch of broken ribs working in the bush but he was able to brush off any suggestion that he stay away from his beloved Christmas tree limit high on the mountain above Radium Junction. Over the objection of his wife and friends, he says he's going to be back in the woods this winter. At 69 he says he's too young to sit idle when there are trees to be cut.

Six weeks before Christmas he was working in his limit. So intent was he on the job that he fell over a 150-foot cliff. After a while he picked himself up and started limping towards town. He came upon the local telephone lineman who could see there was something wrong but couldn't get Fritz to admit it.

"Take me to the hotel for a beer," Fritz gritted.

In the hotel, one of his friends saw him and said, **"Fritz, what happened?"**

But Fritz remained tight-lipped --- and gratefully accepted a ride home.

Three days later he was back working in the bush. Later he noticed his arm and chest turning black. One of his men made a hasty run with him to the doctor in Invermere. The doctor took one look, gave him a shot of pain killer, got him into an operating room --- and found a broken shoulder blade and collar-bone. They let him out of the hospital three days before Christmas.

For Fritz Trachsel, life just wouldn't be life if he couldn't live in the mountains. Mountains were the prime force of his boyhood years in his native Frutigen, Berner-Oberland, Switzerland. His father was a slate miner and like most other people of the area, he owned a small mountain-bound farm. It was here Fritz played and worked (although to him there always seemed more of the latter) during his youth.

"I think the reason I never got to be very tall is because I had to pack so much salt up the mountain to those goats," he said, and burst into uproarious laughter. It wasn't all work. He and his brothers and sisters learned to ski on polished barrel staves. Fritz can cut a mean slalom down the slopes of the Panorama ski hill back of Invermere today.

With the school over he went to work in a hotel operated by some of his father's relative as an apprentice cook and gardener. After three years of this he went to the grill in the Kaiserhof Hotel in Berlin to advance further as a cook.

"And so you graduated as a chef," I observed.

'Ach, no, I was never a chef. I was a cook," he said. **"It takes 20 years to become a chef."** Which provides the answer to a lot of things I have suspected about some of the "Chefs" hereabouts.

At the time Trachsel was there the Kaiserhof was one of the biggest hotels in the world and certainly boasted one of the best dining rooms. Its kitchen staff of 127 was the cream of the crop of Europe.

He left the Kaiserhof in Berlin in a hurry in 1917. From there to the ownership of a small dairy farm at Windermere B.C. in 1937 is another story.”

Heritage Day Luncheon
Friday, February 16
12 o'clock
Invermere Inn
Soup and Sandwich or Pasta
\$7.00