

[Albert Beaujon]

W15021

[?] [Beaujon?] Conn. 1938-9

Albert Beaujon, 75 Park Street, Thomaston:

"I worked up in Lakeville, worked in Northfield, worked in Thomaston, worked down in Bridgeport, makin' knives, and made good money.

Business got bad and I went to work in the clock shop. Now I's seventy five years old and nobody wants as any more. I work on the WPA, but they wanta have me quit that. Say I's gettin' too old. Say I oughta apply for old age pension. Seven bucks a week. My old lady's sixty.

She can't get any, unless they change the law. She says if they change the law, fine, get through, we'll get along okay if we both draw pensions, but otherwise how're we gonna do it?

"I pay sixteen dollars rent. Then there's light and gas and fuel in the winter time. How's I gonna do all that on seven bucks a week?

I got a boy works up here in the tavern. Know how much they pay him? Eight dollars a week. He can't help me much. He hasta work twelve-thirteen hours a day for it, too. And then they tell me I oughta quit work.

"I can still do a day's work. I don't look my age do I? You'd never think I was seventy five, would you? I been all over lookin' for a job. What I'd like to get is to take care of somebody's place for 'em. You know, mow the lawn and like that. But I looked all over hell.

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Even went up to that knife shop in Winsted. Some Eytalians run it. They ain't doin' much, though.

"It ain't nothin' like it used to be. I started workin' up in Lakeville at the knife trade. Worked there when Jim Truelove came to this country. He come up there to work, and I remember him well, a cocky little Johnny bull. His kids were all small then.

"My brother-in-law taught me the trade. He was a cutler, right from the old country. And a good man, too. They put him in charge of a room. I s'pose you've heard a good many stories about how careful them English knifemakers was. This'll 2 show you. I was polishin' some bolsters one day and my brother-in-law come along. He looked at 'em and he says, 'You'll have to do better than that, Al.' I says, 'What's the matter with 'em?' 'scratched', he says. 'I don't see no scratches,' I says, 'Go on out and get a cheap pair of glasses, Al,' he says and come back. I did, and when I looked at them bolsters with the glasses, I could see scratches. 'You better wear 'em when you're workin' after this,' he says. I thought my eyes was all right, up to then.

"Lakeville was a good place to work. Well, they was all pretty good, in them days, except the cities. I went down to Bridgeport, and I was like a fish out of water. I couldn't get on to it at all, the way they did it. Up in Lakeville, the fellas used to like to go fishin'.

Lake was right near.by nearby , of course. They was about fifty of them workin', mostly English, and independent as hell. Old Man Holly used to get worried, along in the fishin' season, whether he was gonna get any work done or not. He used to come into the factory and say, 'sow look, boys, this order has got to be done this week. Please try and stick it out unti Saturday.' All the johnnies had their own boats, you know, and when the mood struck 'em they'd walk out and go fishin'.

"Shop's shut down now, ain't doin' anything. Knife business has gone to hell, but nobody seems to care. There ain't the demand for 'em there used to be, I guess. I worked on what

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they called the sportsman's knife. Had a half dozen different articles in it, like a screw driver, and a little pick for takin' the stones out of a horse's hoof and such. It was kind of difficult work, because you hadda fit the right sections together in every knife, see what I mean? I mean, you couldn't mix up the parts. Parts that were made for one knife, wouldn't fit another, see? But nobody wants knives like that any more. They make what they call 'skeleton knives' up in Winsted. Hell, a good knifemaker wouldn't even bother with 'em.

3

"I worked over in New Britain for a while, too. They went/ in for high pressure production over there. But brother, I's tellin' you their knives wasn't any damn good. Used to come back by the dozens. Blades would bend and break and chip. They didn't know how to temper 'em right, you see. That's an art in itself, hardenin' is. Ask Jim Truelove.

"Man used to get a good reputation at some particular job, he could go to work most anywhere. Like Jim Truelove. He was a good blade forger and hardener, and the clock shop down here is glad to have him workin' for 'em today, with all their high pressure production. Ever hear of the Holmes boys? They used to work around here, I think. They were good grinders. It stands to reason a machine ground knife ain't done as good as what those hand grinders could do.

"Well, I don't know. I s'pose even if I got a job in a knife shop tomorrow I wouldn't be able to remember half of it. Like to try it again, though. Even on piecework I could probably make more's I's makin' now. Thirteen months I was on the town, before I got on the WPA.

You don't get any too much from the town, either. I thought I'd go crazy hangin' around. Work a couple days a week. I'da worked six, just to have somethin' to do, but they wouldn't let me. They didn't hare much to do.

"Just like now. What're they gonna do when they get all these roads fixed up? What're they gonna do when the work gives out? They must be pretty near caught up now. They don't wanta lot people start hangin' around, or they'll have a lot of crazy folks on their hands.

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Drives a man crazy, or drives him to drink, hangin' around. s'pose everybody'll be back on the town. But what're the towns gonna do? They can't stand it. note

“Hell, they don't half feed a man. I was talkin' to Mike McDonald today. He gets a couple of days work from the town. He says he don't get enough to stick to his ribs. Says he don't know what the hell meat tastes like. He's livin' over there on School Street in Tommy Colwell's old place. Mike says he thinks there's a curse on it. Even a cat or a dog won't come near it, Mike says. Said he had the notion to try dog meat one—a these days, but nary a dog could he ketch.”