

# Getting Paid

*by Stephen DeVoy*

It was the end of summer and Rusty had been working throughout his high school break for a tree nursery in the Blue Hills. For the most part, the nursery employed illegal workers from the Azores. In New Bedford, there was a large Portuguese speaking community centered around fishing. Some also found agricultural work. The Portuguese owner of the nursery took advantage of this to cut corners and save on labor costs. This summer there was a shortage of illegal labor so the owner hired a white boy from the suburbs.

As many employers of undocumented workers sometimes do, the owner of the nursery cheated his workers out of their last paycheck. He knew they wouldn't complain to the authorities for fear of deportation. This practice became so ingrained in his procedures that he did the same to Rusty. At the end of the summer, with two weeks pay due, the owner refused to pay.

Now Rusty was just a kid and he didn't know what to do about the situation. He was angry, but no one wanted to help him over \$150.00 dollars. He decided to discuss the problem with his friend, Steve.

At the same time, Steve was house-sitting for his girlfriend who was in Maine with her family. Rusty rode his bike over to Rosemary's house where he found Steve. Together, they brainstormed and came up with a solution.

They spent the next few days gathering the tools they would need: wire-cutters, rope, flashlights, coal, gloves, portable shovels, branch cutters, an ax, a spike, a large rubber covered mallet, wire, duct tape, salt, a change of clothes, a bottle of water, paper towels, and two small hand-hoes. Prepared, on the last day, they waited until nightfall.

They each dressed in camouflage pants, black t-shirts, and black sneakers. They packed their tools into their backpacks, mounted their bikes, and peddled off into the late summer night. It was warm and humid as they made their way along the dark and winding tree-covered streets which formed the five mile route up to their destination in the Blue Hills.

The final road was a dirt road. They ditched their bikes behind some shrubs, pulled out the charcoal, and rubbed it on their faces and arms. Each donned his gloves. Rusty, flashlight in hand, led the way to the fence. When they arrived, Rusty pulled out the wire cutters.

"Is that necessary," Steve asked. "We could just climb over the fence."

"Yeah, I suppose we could," said Rusty, "but that wouldn't cost the bastard anything. Besides, lets take no chances. We don't want to leave any evidence on the fence or risk getting stuck."

Rusty began cutting the links in the chain-linked fence. After about 20 minutes of taking turns, they managed to create a hole large enough for the two to pass through. They crawled through, dragging their backpacks behind them, and then continued their mission.

Rusty pointed to a section of the nursery with the largest trees. The trees were about 8 feet tall and very thin.

Using an ax, they felled their first tree. Each tree had its roots bundled in a burlap bag, but the bags were rather large and had been beneath the ground for some time. This made them rather solid bags of root and dirt. Next to the stem of the tree, they drove the spike into the bag using the mallet, pounding away until a straight path about 8 inches deep had been made. The spike was withdrawn and together they lifted the tree and inserted its cut bottom into the hole they just made. While Steve held up the tree, Rusty wrapped some wire around the bottom of the tree's stem and the top of stem sticking up from the roots. Next he wrapped the joint formed by the wire with duct tape. They shook the tree and convinced themselves that it would stand for at least a few days. Finally, they dug up dirt from around the tree and piled it about the modified base of the tree.

"If it doesn't fall down," Rusty said, "it will start turning brown in a couple of days. The shit-bag won't know what happened for some time. Let's do a few more!" And so they did. A total of 4 trees were "modified."

"The longer it takes for him to find out that something happened, the less chance he will be able to trace it to us," Steve whispered.

"That's the idea," answered Rusty.

Next they walked deep into a stand of young trees. "No one will walk back here for a few days," noted Rusty. "Let's just give these trees a trim." Within about a half hour, a dozen trees were turned into denuded poles.

After dealing with the older trees, the two went over to a row of baby trees and poured a large quantity of salt around their bases, hoping this would damage the saplings.

"OK, I've now been paid!" announced Rusty. "Let's go!"

They worked their way back to the fence, using the hand-hoes to smooth their footprints. After passing through the hole in the fence, they reconstructed it as best they could using the rope to "relink" the chain linked fence. Since it was behind a

bush in a remote area of the nursery, they figured it wouldn't be seen immediately.

Outside the fence, Steve and Rusty washed the coal off their faces and arms using the water and paper towels. They packed everything back into their backpacks, changed their clothes, and biked back to Rosemary's house, where the two took turns showering. Finally, they washed and dried their soiled clothes and returned the tools. They never found out what happened and no one ever discovered who did it, but they shared a sense of victory, justice, and satisfaction.

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