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## Review - Roustabout

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# Reviews . . . Reviews . . . Reviews

## Roustabout

— by *Donita Lucas Shields*

William Rintoul's sketches in *ROUSTABOUT* provide a vivid portrayal of oilfield life during the era of wooden derricks and steam boilers. It matters not that the time span is yesterday. Today's counterparts who exist in the "oilie" society face the same lifestyle as did earlier roustabouts.

The author's efforts are timely and contemporary for those now living amid the surge of drilling and production activity in Oklahoma's Deep Anadarko Basin. With warmth and insight, Mr. Rintoul propels the uninitiated and uninformed into oilfield activities of Wilson, California, through the eyes of Clayton Gaskill, a one-year liberal arts student from the University of Arkansas.

Not knowing an ell from a tee connection or a ball-peen from a thirty-six, Clayton hires out as a weevil for Conestoga American Oil Company with intentions of working one year and saving his money. He plans to give a two-week notice and then head for easy living in Mexico or South America.

Connie Am places Clayton with good-natured gangpusher Orval Hovel and his congenial crew. After a few months' experience, Clayton feels he is on equal footing with the work gang. With his promotion from Roustabout B to Roustabout A, he considers himself a weevil no longer. Clayton's pride of belonging surpasses his \$7.00 a day raise in pay.

Surrounded with temptations which separate most oilfield workers from their pay checks, Clayton retains his identity and his original ambitions. He spends nights reading by yellow bunkhouse lights instead of frequenting the oil town bars, gambling dens, strip shows, and the inevitable Waikiki Rooms.

For entertainment Gaskill joins his companions in watching girls, drinking a few beers, and eating at greasy diners. With no questions asked and with no personal character judgments, Clayton accepts the crew as they accept him. Common bonds of eight grueling hours daily in hot, dusty, windy summer followed by cold, foggy, windy winter weld the men together as a close-knit fraternity.

The roustabouts repair rusty, plugged pipes and broken sucker rods, frequently drenching their faces and clothing with unexpected pearly oil baths. They build drilling rigs then tear them down and burn discarded lumber. They

install new pipelines and willingly work overtime digging and covering ditches because Connie Am rewards them with the best steak dinners in Wilson.

Clayton empathizes with his fellow workers' heartbreaks: Cofield's knowing his party-girl wife is out on the town while he works; Soldier's problems with his live-in woman from the cookhouse who is nothing but bad news; Larkie's hurried-up, unhappy marriage which is followed by a raunchy congratulations party; Bernard's humorous ignorance of bank accounts and banking procedures as he attempts to get rich enough to buy company stock.

At the end of his year as a roustabout, Clayton's dream of sizeable savings turns into a \$3,000 reality. However, during the 12 months with Conestoga American Oil Company, he meets Juanita, a delightful, darkhaired waitress employed at his favorite eating place. His plans for a carefree future begin to waiver.

When he and Bernard become champion pipe-cutters during the town's annual Wildcat Days festivities, Clayton's visions of sandy beaches south of the border evaporate. The pretty waitress' proud expression convinces him that his life as a settled Connie Am company man could be most fulfilling.

*ROUSTABOUT* is a bargain at \$4.95. It may be purchased from Seven Buffaloes Press (Editor Art Cuelho; Box 249; Big Timber, MT 59011).