

Jim Bludsoe

As recited by
Harry Dyer
08-08-1941 Madison, WI

No I cannot tell where he lives
Because he don't live, you see
Leastwise he's got out of the habit
Of living like you and me.

Where have you been the last three years
That you haven't heard folk tell
About Jim Bludsoe cashed in his checks
That night on the Prairie Bell?

He weren't no saint
Them engineers are pretty much all alike
On life at Natchez under the Hill
Another one here in Pike.

A peerless chap and his talk was bill
But an awkward man in a row
But he never flunked nor he never lied
I reckon he never knowed how.

And this was all the religion he had,
Was to treat his engines well.
Never was he passed on the river
In the mind of the pilot's bell.

And if ever the Prairie Bell took fire
A thousand times he swore
That he'd old her nose again' the bank
'Til the last soul got ashore.

All boats have their day on the Mississipp
And her day came at last.
Moon Star was a better boat
And she vowed that she'd never be passed.

And she came a'tearing along that night
The oldest craft in the line,
With a nigger squat on the safety valve
And her furnace crammed, resin and pine.

A fire broke out as she cleared the bar
And burnt a hole in the night.
And quick as a flash, she turned and made
For that widest bank on the right.

There was shreakin' and cursin' as the bill
rolled out
Over all the infernal roar.
"I hold her nose agin' the bank
Til the last gallow's [?] ashore.

Through the hot, black breath of the burning
boat
Jim Bludsoe's voice was heard.
And they all had faith in his cussedness
'Cause they knowed he would keep his word.

And true enough, they all got off
Before the smokestack fell
And Bludsoe's ghost went up alone
In the smoke of the Prairie Bell.

You are no saint, but on judgment day
I'd take my chance with Jim
While along side of some pious gentlemen
Who wouldn't have shook hands with him.

He seen his duty, a dead sure thing
And he went for it thar and then
And Christ ain't going to be too hard
On the man that died for men.

From the Helene Stratman-Thomas Collection.

Critical Commentary

Transcription by Peters, p. 240, and HST

HST notes:

In the Professional Papers series:

Written by John Hay Wausau

Sources:

Kennedy, Charles O'Brien. *American Ballads – Naughty, Ribald, and Classic*. New York: Fawcett Publications, 1952. "Jim Bludso"

Peters, Harry B., ed. *Folk Songs out of Wisconsin: An Illustrated Compendium of Words and Music*. Madison, WI: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1977.

K.G.