

John's Wonderful Christmas

Once in awhile, just when we least expect it, Santa Claus pays a special visit to a grown-up and we all become believers again. This happened this Christmas, 2007 to brother John, as the e-mail below attests. At the bottom, I've added a couple of short memories that I have of John and the family Farmall AV. H. O.

From: "John C. Olson" <jc.olson@comcast.net>
Date: Tue Dec 25, 2007 9:51:21 AM
Subject: My Christmas Present

Every once in a while people really manage to catch you by surprise. This Christmas Eve I was really blown away! I understand that this 1946 Farmall AV was one of the best-kept family secrets ever, as I didn't have a clue when I opened a small box that contained a picture frame with a picture of the tractor sitting in a storage shed. I would like to share some history that makes this old farm tractor so valuable to me.

Sometime after 1946 our Dad bought a 1940 or 41 Farmall AV from a neighbor named Milo Thompson. Milo had owned the Farmall Dealership in Spruce. It was a "big deal" as I remember because it was the first decent tractor we had. I was four or five at the time. My older Brother, Frank, can likely give us the exact dates.

The 1940 model had electric start (six volt) but often needed to be cranked especially in cold weather. It also had hand levers to operate the row crop cultivators. It was machine made for cultivating with it's offset engine and high wheels. Due to WWII, production stopped somewhere around 1942 and didn't start again until 1946. The after-war model offered hydraulic lifts as an option. Milo Thompson ordered the "new" after-war version and agreed to sell the "1940" to our Dad. Post war brought bigger farms and the need for bigger tractors; thus the AV ceased production very shortly after the war. As a result this AV model is really rare unit. To my knowledge and those I have talked with, these two tractors were the only AV's sold in Spruce or in that part of the State.

After Dad and Mom died and the family decided to sell the farm, Lloyd and Kathryn purchased Dad's AV. At that stage of my life I simply couldn't afford it and was pleased that it stayed in the family.

I had grown up with that machine and we had some real history together. Many mistakes were made that required repairs on my part with Dad's "supervision." You never wanted to be "supervised" by our Dad!

In my early teens I had a rather traumatic experience with that AV. Dad and a neighbor had made a snowplow out of a land roller (splitting it in half) to attach to the front of the tractor. It was a real "Rube Goldberg" as Dad would have described it, much too heavy for the lift system. One snowy winter morning, he thought it would be a good idea that I plow ahead of him the mile and a half to US23 so that he could go to work. Our Dad simply didn't miss work! You want a definition of cold? Try sitting on an open tractor at 5:30AM in a snowstorm for an hour or so with your Dad in a warm car behind you!

On the return trip I met our neighbor Peewee Bushrow at his driveway. He had left his car at the road that night in anticipation of the storm as their driveway was about 200 yards long. When he got up in the early morning to do "milking," he had found his Dad lying on the floor. With no phone service but in Spruce, he had rushed to his car, driven to Spruce, called for an ambulance and was returning . He asked if I would attempt to clear his drive for the ambulance arrival. I remember hitting the snowbanks so hard that I nearly knocked the wind out of myself hitting the steering wheel! When we finally got to the house, his Dad had died. It was a heavy shock of a kid my age

We later discovered that I had cracked the die-cast transmission case with the punishment I gave the AV trying to clear the drive. This one Dad understood! It's been welded several times since.

Many years later the Thompson's sold the "new" AV to of all people, Peewee Bushrow! That was the last I remember, as I went away to school.

The Bushrow farm was sold and I don't know the owners. On Lloyd's behalf I've always kept my eyes open for a AV in dealerships, tractor boneyards and even antique tractor shows. I've never seen another until this summer.

I was driving from Spruce to Eric's cottage when I passed what was the Rassmusen farm and there it was! I did a double take! It must be a model A and my imagination! Later that day I made myself drive by again a little more slowly. Sure enough! It was real! I drove in and talked to this retiree from Buick. Where did you get it? I asked. He said he purchased it at an estate action on M65 in Alcona county.

At that moment I was knee-deep in projects. We were remodeling a kitchen that was way over budget, and working on a addition at Eric's that had some financing issues with him in Iraq. What I didn't need was one more project. I told Carol about it but wouldn't even go back for fear I would give in to temptation. Several weeks later I did drive by and it was gone. Thank God I won't worry about that thing anymore.

Well you know the rest of the story! My Dear Wife took it on as a project to get that AV! She bought it, had it moved and put in storage and gave it to me for a Christmas present! Pretty Cool!

At this moment I can't prove it's the actual Thompson tractor but the odds are on my side that it is. I'll be checking with Kim Thompson to see if the family has anything that will help verify its history. In the meantime I have a few hundred hours of work to do to bring it back to showroom condition. I look forward to my Grandkids driving this piece of history. John .

Sister Honey's Memories

It was our Dad's habit to come home from work, have supper and then, after chores, work around the property until it got dark. On Saturdays, he was out most of the day, coming in every couple of hours for coffee and a "little something," usually a piece of pie or a cookie.

One day, fairly early in the spring, when it was still pretty bleak and damp and the fields were just barely able to be worked, he went out to disc our large garden (about a half acre), taking

Johnny along to ride on his lap. Johnny had just turned six in March. Mother was working around the kitchen when she let out a gasp. Out the kitchen window she could see Daddy putting brush on a pile that he was burning. The tractor was coming down the field, apparently without a driver. Just then, the tractor got to the end of the garden and made a turn to go back the other direction. Driving it was Johnny, who could just barely see over the steering wheel and had to stand up to reach the brakes. Mother was not pleased and when Daddy and Johnny came in for coffee, she let Daddy know. Dad, however, was delighted, as was Johnny, who drove the tractor from then on.

Fast forward ten years. I was just out of college, so John must have been sixteen. It was a Friday and we doing the last minute preparation to leave early the next morning for an across-country camping trip to visit Dad's brother Harold in Seattle, Washington. Mother and I were trying to finish the packing and get the house in some kind of condition to leave.

John was working on the yard and hauling some unsightly junk to a little dumping ground we had below a knoll on the edge of our woodlot. As he drove up to the edge of the dump area, the tractor slid on some damp straw that had been dumped there the previous fall. Mother looked out the window just in time to see the tractor slide sideways and tilt up with one of the big wheels off the ground. At the same time, John hit the kill switch and baled off.

To everyone's enormous relief, the tractor didn't roll and John was OK. However, the tractor was now sitting in a precarious position, still hitched to the trailer and looking ready to go over.

Our Dad was a nervous person and it was almost a guarantee he would arrive home from work already pretty anxious about the trip the next morning. Poor John was a wreck. He didn't want to get back on the tractor himself and Mom wouldn't have let him go anyway. He tried convincing Mother that she could drive the tractor out. She wasn't about to risk it and said we would just have to wait for Daddy. John paced most of the rest of the day and finally, when it was near time for Dad to arrive home, he sat himself on the front step, where he always waited when he had something to tell.

Daddy could really blow his stack when he perceived that we had done something careless or willful, but he could also sense when we were really upset and then he was amazingly understanding. He must have seen the anxiety in John's face, not that it was hard to miss. In any event, he heard out the story and then went back to look the situation over. They un-hitched the trailer and pulled it away. Then with all of us anxiously watching, he got on the tractor, leaned his weight way over to the uphill side and slowly drove the tractor out.

(Dec. 2007)