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Abernethy, Francis Edward, Untiedt, Kenneth L.

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THE DAY GRANDPA BLEW UP THE TRACTOR

by Duane L. Spiess of Helotes

In 1968 my grandfather bought a used John Deere, Model H tractor for the princely sum of $75.00. Actually the tractor was manufactured in 1939, and had spent its long life sitting out in the fields. While most people referred to a John Deere as a “popping Johnny,” we promptly welcomed the new addition to our family as “the Tractor.” Grandpa used the tractor for pulling stumps and dragging cedar to a burn-pile, because his 1946 Chevy pickup, “Ruby,” wouldn’t do the job.

One particularly large cedar stump was too formidable for the tractor to pull. So, on every opportunity Grandpa would run into the stump with the blade on the front of the tractor. Incidentally, the stump remains in place to this day.

Anyway, on the day in point Grandpa slammed into the stump, thinking this might be his lucky day; but, alas, the tractor gasped under the load and stalled, killing the engine. Undaunted, Grandpa walked off to his next project. Later he returned, only to discover that he had forgotten to shut off the gasoline when the tractor stalled out. Much to Grandpa’s surprise, when he went to start the tractor, he soon found the engine wouldn’t turn over because the cylinders were full of gasoline.

I should mention here that the Model H is a two-cylinder, hand-crank engine. Starting is accomplished by rolling over a large
flywheel, which, in turn, cranks the engine and generates a spark from the magneto.

Not to be outwitted by the situation Grandpa took out the spark plugs and slowly rolled the engine over until the last fling generated a good spark out of the magneto, which resulted in one hell of an explosion and fire.

Grandpa let out a scream. He was losing his tractor and we all stood around in horror. After the fire went out we approached the tractor and, to our surprise, found that solid, all-metal tractors don’t burn. Grandpa started the tractor up and went about his business.

By the way, you can still see Grandpa and the Model H working around the place. Both are older, but they still persist in their fond partnership.
Charles Culberson Denman was trying a case in Federal Court in Tyler during the mid-1930s. Mr. Cub was defending a sharecropper who had decided that his corn would bring a better price as moonshine than it would on the Depression market. The prosecution had him dead to rights because the revenuers had brought in the evidence of his misdeeds, a pint bottle of moonshine.

Mr. Cub, speaking for the defense, said “Your Honor, I have so much faith in my client, Mr. Ayres, that if I am convinced that what you have in that jar is whiskey, and it came from Mr. Ayres’s place we will plead guilty and throw ourselves on the mercy of the court.”

The federal prosecutor arose for his opening argument and asked Mr. Cub what it would take to convince him, and the defense said he would like to examine the evidence. The prosecutor handed him the jar. Cub opened it and handed it to his client and said “Did this come from your place?” The Old Man upped the jar, sampled a generous portion, and said, “Yes, it did.” Cub upped the jar and killed the contents. He smacked his lips and said, “It isn’t whiskey in the jar. I don’t know what it is but it’s not whiskey.”

Mr. Cub handed the empty jar to the judge and moved that the case be dismissed for lack of evidence. Which it was.