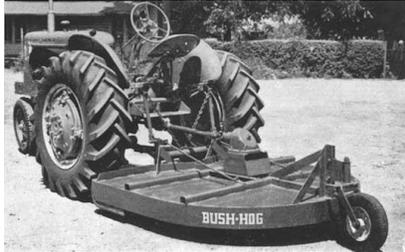


## Mowing on The Farm by Kevin O'Madden

I remember when I was young and we lived on a farm in Ohio. One of the chores my brother Shawn and I had was mowing the front property. We had at the time an old Ford tractor, one with three forward speeds and one reverse. To mow the yard, we had a “bush hog” mower that



hooked to the tractor and was powered by a separate drive shaft that connected to the drive line at the rear of the tractor. Now keep in mind Shawn and I were eleven and ten years old respectively, so driving the tractor and mowing was not so much a chore as an opportunity to operate a large, complex machine. Consequently, there was never any real objection on our part to the task. We did, however, put up the expected shuffling of the feet, muttering “aw shoot, do I have to?” every

time the duty was “thrust” upon us, but never enough to lose the chance to be the one to do the driving.

Our property in Columbus Ohio was twenty some odd acres, approximately three of which made up the “front lawn.” The eastern most edge was bordered by a steep ravine which dropped about forty feet to a small creek bed.

For the most part Shawn was the more experienced operator, and I hadn't really gotten good at mowing along the edge of the ravine. In any event, my first pass along the edge started out fine, but about half way down, the right side of the bush hog left solid ground and was cutting open air out over the ravine. Well, for some reason, I was not aware of this until more than half of the mower was over the edge and the tractor ceased its forward motion. It was precisely then that I looked back in horror to see the bush hog mowing the face of the cliff and the tractor was slowly going backward toward the precipice even though the wheels were steadily churning forward, something to do with the law of gravity I'm sure. Amazingly I didn't follow my first instinct which was to abandon ship, but immediately stood on top of the clutch and brake simultaneously, ceasing the backward motion, but doing nothing to correct my predicament. I also happened to notice two things that were also going on. 1) the steering wheels on the tractor were about six inches off the ground (something about a fulcrum and a lever I would find out about in later studies of physics, 2) I was screaming exactly like a small girl. My brother Shawn, though being on the other side of the property, mounted on his faithful steed “Chappo”, came galloping over to see what poor little girl was being so horribly tortured. He at once grasped the dire situation his idiot brother was in and 1) dismounted his horse in full gallop, 2) while still airborne, leapt onto the front of the tractor, and clutching the grill work in his fingers, brought the front end back down to the earth.

Calmly he said, “Kevin, put the tractor in first gear (I was in third) and SLOWLY release the clutch.” Knowing that Shawn was older and wiser, I followed his directions to the letter . . . somewhat (remember, I was in full blown panic). I jammed the machine in first and popped the clutch. Two things happened immediately, 1) the tractor LEAPT forward and jerked the brush hog back onto solid ground, 2) from the front of the tractor I heard what sounded like a small girl screaming.