

Travel With a Full Set of Tools

Poems by David Haskell

SUD2

Now my uncle-in-law was a generous man,
He gave us a tractor when he passed away.
A crawler they bought back in "51".
The year of my wife's first birthday.

I was excited as a boy on Christmas Day,
A real Tonka Toy I could say was mine.
A piece of equipment from the old ranch,
With only 6800 hours of working time.

I consulted with the office mechanics,
Their knowledge was questioned by few.
Retired growers and Iowa farm boys.
For free advice, it was the best I could do.

There are 24 steps for starting a D2,
One remembered from a Cal Poly exam.
But he was a Ag Business major,
And he hated getting grease on my hands.

They warned me that diesel tractor won't start,
With just the turn of an ignition key.
There was a pony motor you had to deal with.
A foreign concept for a city boy like me.

Check the electrical and fuel system first,
That's usually what goes wrong.
And don't call for a diesel mechanic,
Or else your money will soon be gone.

If the diesel smells funny, better drain the tank,
And the filter and the injectors too.
Then you have to re-prime the fuel system.
A task that is not easy to do.

They said “go easy” with the starting fluid,
Even though it could be a sure start.
The cylinders could fire too early.
And that pony could come flying apart.
So we primed the spark plugs with gasoline,
And I pulled on that flywheel rope.
To bring that tractor back to life,
on a mixture of ether and hope.

We keep feeding her shots of gasoline,
until a plug wire finally broke.
And a spark arched through that ether cloud.
I almost lost my partner in a puff of smoke.

The carburetor was impossible to adjust,
Maybe it was a sign to leave it alone.
Uncle had set it from past experience,
And I couldn't just call him on the phone.

The throttle and choke knobs were side by side,
Entwined with a spark plug wire.
One time I shuck hands with the magneto.
And I sounded like a Hallelujah Choir.

She's just an overgrown mower motor.
How could starting her be so hard?
I've seen these old tractors running.
Did they drag-start them back at the yard?

We ran crying to the local Cat. dealer,
With our tale of frustrated woe.
But a customer in line behind us,
Tipped us a secret a parts man wouldn't know.

Give her four spark plug shots of gasoline,
In each cylinder before you give it a pull.
With a spritz of ether in the air filter,
She should start and that's no bull.

The pony motor finally came to life,
With a sound that pounded our ears.

My God, we had finally done it.
We traded cheers and had another beer.

Well, the pony started with the choke in or out,
But what worked better I could never tell.
And it started better in the afternoon.
She was a piece of mechanical hell.

The bleeder valves for the injector pumps,
Were designed by an engineer with a grudge.
They say he caught his wife in bed with a mechanic,
And he turned meaner than a Mississippi judge.

The tractor's manual Uncle left was helpful,
The instructions were simple and clear.
Use the pony motor to prime the diesel.
It's easy and there's nothing to fear.

We bled the filter, we bled the pumps,
Until all the bubbles disappeared.
And we cranked the diesel against compression,
To generate heat, it seemed kinda weird.

But when I opened the injector pumps,
She gulped the diesel down without a burp.
Or even a reassuring puff of smoke.
More frustration, I was ready to desert.

SUD2,
I've had it with you.
I know once you were Peoria's pride.
But Uncle's last wish,
Has only brought anguish,
And it might end in a suicide.

Travel With A Full Set of Tools

My father was a backyard mechanic,
But it wasn't to make money on the side.
It was more of a financial necessity,
Mixed in with his New England pride.

I started off holding the flashlight,
When the repairs lasted into the night.
And searching for nuts in the coffee cans,
When the original had bounced out of sight.

We repaired the Volkswagens together.
I was the reluctant member of the team.
A teenager with more important things to do,
Than wash wheel bearings with gasoline.

“Pump it up three times and hold it”,
“And don’t relax till I tell you to”.
And he bled the air from the brake lines.
Another brake job was almost through.

He showed me you can fix almost anything,
With the right tools, patience and care.
And keep your temper in the tool box,
Or you’ll damage what you are trying to repair.

He said travel with a full set of tools,
And with experience you’ll learn what to do.
And the key to success in your life,
Is how you use the tools that you carry with you.

The crescent wrench is strong and adjustable,
It can be your most versatile tool.
It’s strength comes from your set of values,
That can be flexible when you set the rules.

The vicegrips can hold almost anything,
Sometimes, that’s all you can do.
And with your tenacity alone,
Break the rust and bring the solution through.

Those box and open-end wrenches,
Are forged with American made steel.
Don’t torque your values down too tightly,
Time may change the way that you feel.

He showed me the leverage in a screw driver,
Turn it with a firm and steady hand.
With discipline you can change behavior,
Or strip the head with too many demands.

Your temper can be the strongest hammer,
With enough pounding you can break hardened steel.
Or flatten the threads in a relationship,
Leaving cross threads that will never heal.

A sense of humor is the best grease,
To lubricate relationships in life.
To keep those ball-joints turning,
With your family, friends and wife.

So travel with a full set of tools,
And remember this "rule of thumb".
Its easy to take something apart.
The hard part is yet to be done.