

A VENT WINDOW VIEW
“MECHANICAL MEMORY AIDS”
April 2015-B. K. Showalter

Clocks all seem to tick faster as the days go by while at the same time, my recall of exact facts about events and details from times past seems to be fading. Frankly I am unsure if this is due to my aging or if the incoming mass of new things to remember are simply crowding some of the earlier memories out of existence.

This came to mind as I tried to recall the exact age of a neighbor's International pickup that he owned back when I was still attending classes in a one-room schoolhouse. (As I recall, after trying to work through the math, he was still driving that truck when I entered high school.)

As it happened, I was on vacation from school when the truck's owner ended up beneath his steel-wheeled F-12 Farmall tractor when it tipped over backwards as he attempted to drive it across a shallow stream. By the time his wife had collected my mother, my older brother, and me to serve as a rescue party, (we lived about an eighth of a mile from their house) muddy water was about to cover the man's face. That's when he unsnapped his overalls and, with the assistance of my 13 year old brother, slithered half naked out from under the machine.

It's important to understand that, for a man in that era, being observed in a state of undress was far more embarrassing than having been seen doing something stupid such as driving a tractor across a high-banked stream. So that event ended with him scurrying as fast as he could limp toward the house to grab a spare pair of pants. His wife trotted along in his wake alternately commiserating with him and berating him for his reckless use of a shortcut across the high-banked stream.

That neighbor's accident and subsequent rescue serves as a marker on my mental calendar that is likely to last until the Grim Reaper erases what memories my mind still holds.

Sadly, many of the surrounding details of the early periods of my life have been erased or buried beneath a flood of new information and facts. Along with those issues many of my sources with memories of that time and of those events are gone, victims of the GR's scythe. That list includes my brother, the one who assisted in the rescue of our neighbor from that almost "watery" grave with the ancient steel-wheeled Farmall serving as a headstone.

The story of that neighbor's near demise by drowning serves as a lead-in to the subject of this particular Vent Window View column which is that most of us members of CHVA really measure the passage of time by the vehicles we picture in our minds when we recall an event or some foolish mischief in which we participated. Even my brother's recent passing meets that criteria; he had purchased a new Buick just a day or so before his body surrendered to the wear and tear of 83 years spent living at "full-throttle."

I'm unsure that I ever managed to repay him for the use of his almost new '55 Ford while I was in college. It was an occasion when I needed wheels for a date with the girl who eventually became my wife. At the time, I was so poor I probably returned it to him without filling the gas tank. (Hey, it had an overdrive and my date lived only 50 or 60 miles from his house!) Oh well, at the rate time is passing my chance to apologize will come soon enough. In the meantime, he can be composing his apology to me for leading me into close quarters with a trapped skunk. I was 7 or 8 years old at the time, but I have yet to forget the misery of the cold tomato juice bath I suffered through on that frosty October night.