



Growing Up (John Deere) Green

By Emily Buelow

Editor's Note: Emily Buelow is a graduate student at the UW-Madison where she is studying for a M.S. degree in turfgrass science in the Department of Horticulture. Dr. Frank Rossi is her major professor. When she isn't working at the Biotron or in a lab in the basement of the Horticulture building or maintaining research plots at the O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Education Facility, you might find her on the business end of a greens mower or some other machine (unfortunately, not many of them are green) at Blackhawk Country Club in Madison. She expects to complete her degree in July of 1997.

I think of my dad often while I am working. While I was growing up I spent a fair amount of time with him in the yard, looking at tractors at the county fair, and at John Deere family functions. I think he inspired my interest in turfgrass.

Mowing grass at the O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research Facility is pretty much the same as it was mowing our yard or the neighbor's yard. Although these days my mow lines are straighter and I am a little more meticulous. Dad was pretty lenient about my mowing pattern. He was just happy to see the lawn get cut without any major mishaps.

The pay I receive as a UW-Madison graduate student is a little different than what my dad paid me, which was nothing. Yardwork was just something we did as children in our family; it was part of our household responsibilities. It was also a great opportunity to hang out with Dad. Of course, playing my natural role as a kid, I always had to act as though I hated having to spend my afternoon weeding or edging.

My dad did pay me once, though. I don't remember how old I was or in what state of the summer we were in. What I do remember is the way that our yard looked.

Any casual passer-by would have

thought we had sown our lawn to dandelions and that we were harvesting them for wholesale. I realize that I could still be envisioning all of this through a child's eye; I am not suggesting that the dandelions were two feet tall or anything, just that there were a LOT of them.

My dad offered me a half a penny each for all the dandelion flower heads that I could pick that day, and sent me off with a cardboard box. Half a penny doesn't sound like much, but you would be amazed at how little money I needed to buy a load of candy, so I started off excitedly with dollar signs in my eyes, and an empty cardboard box behind me.

I never made it to the front yard. I could have sworn that the dandelions were multiplying while my back was turned. By the time my father came home from work, I had had enough, and I just wanted the money I had earned. After setting to the task of counting, my dad had to shell out \$22 to me for picking about 4,400 dandelion heads. I still cannot believe we had that many dandelions in our back yard, and that I lasted long enough to pick over 4,000 of them.

While not all of the jobs that I do while researching for my Masters thesis are that tedious, Dr. Rossi will tell you that I like to let him think that they are. I haven't given up entirely on that role of pretending that some of my jobs are burdensome.

There were times as a kid when I accidentally mowed over and destroyed things with the mower. There were also times when I actually ran INTO something with the mower — things like the car, another piece of machinery — you know, your basic things to avoid with a riding lawn mower. Dad was pretty level headed about those instances. Luckily for me, my two older sisters got him used to dealing with chewed-up shrubs and paint scrapes around the posts long before I ever hopped on a mower.

As the daughter of a John Deere engineer, I slept with my "Johnny Deereest" stuffed yellow and green deer, wore John Deere t-shirts, and had the best toy tractor collection in the neighborhood. I also used to make my dad crafts in school with deer on them. I once made a rug with a big "JD" on it in shades of yellow and green, hoping he would hang it on his office wall. I don't think it ever made it.

I grew up thinking that there simply was no other company that supplied the wonderful things for people that John Deere did. Of course, I was wrong. After I came to the realization that there were competitors, whenever I would ride in the car with my dad, he would teach me which color of equipment went with which competitor, and what sorts of other equipment they had in common with John Deere. I was wholly convinced that no company could be better. I figured that no other companies had my father working for them, so they didn't stand a chance.

To be honest, I didn't even consider pursuing a career in the turf industry until I took Dr. Rossi's class. I don't know why it wasn't obvious to either me or my father. Perhaps he was remembering some of my mowing mishaps and figured I should stay away from working with machinery. I think he realizes that I have outgrown that clumsiness and that I am happy working in an industry to which he originally exposed me.

I felt great two years ago at the GCSAA meeting in San Francisco to walk around with my dad and have him introduce me to his peers as his daughter who is studying turfgrass. He's always been proud of both my sisters and me, but it showed me that he too knew that the turf industry was the natural place for me to be. 🍷

