

Hi. I'm Sophie. Grade 11. I was with Grandpa yesterday. He asked how things were going. So I mentioned my big problem. You see, we live on a farm near Fairfax. And my parents won't get me a car to get to school. I'd even be happy with an old beater. They want my grades to go up first. My Grandpa got an ear-full. He likes to poke fun. But he listens too.

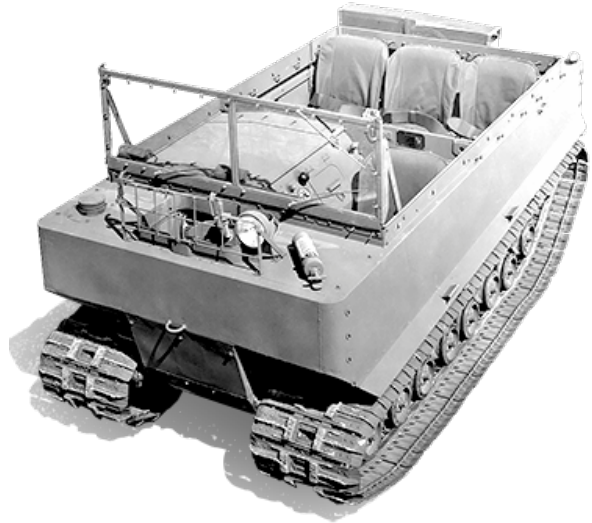
Grandpa lives in town now, but visits the farm alot. We were in the pasture, to cut burrs from our horses' tails and manes. I love horses. Even just hanging with them on a sunny Spring day. Our horse Pat, is so calm, I lie on his back and read a book! Mom says Grandpa loves horses too. But as a farmer he had little time to dawdle. He's always doing something! The horses came willingly. We started cleaning them up.

Did I tell you, grandpa asked, about the years I drove kids to Fairfax school as a teenager? *I shook my head.* It was before WWII, he went on, and I was helping on the farm. This farm. Our roads were dirt tracks. So in Winter and Spring our cars were useless. Parents around here offered to pay me to get their kids to school. How do you think I did that? *I hunched my shoulders.* *With horses I guess?* Yep. We put sides and roof on our sleigh. We added a small wood stove, hitched the horses and away I went. We called it a school van!

Grandpa moved around to work on the tail. We didn't use roads though, he continued. We went from farm to farm, over snow, across fields, through pastures, zigzagging our way to Fairfax. *I paused my work, visualizing grandpa as that young man.* At school I unhitched, put the horses in a barn. And settled down in one of our heated sleighs with the other drivers to play cards. And after school, we'd head home. Sophie, you've ridden horse into a winter sunset? Yeah. *That's just about the best, Grandpa, I answered.* *Warm horse breath drifts away in clouds, while the sun sets pink and yellow.* *How long did you have that job?*

A few years. After the war, the McFaddens surprised us. They bought a surplus army vehicle, called a Weasel. Rigged it up to pull their covered sleigh. Two teenage sons got to drive the noisy thing. *What did it look like?* Well, it was meant to move soldiers quickly

over the snow. So it had caterpillar tracks and room for 6 adults. It could go 50 kms an hour. Crazy fast for those days! It could go through reedy marshes and steep ditches, over drifts like small mountains. Places I'd never take the horses.



*Military transportation - re-purposed as a "school bus".*

*So Grandpa? Would you rather drive kids to school with horses or with a Weasel?*

Hmm. Horses need a lot of land. But they're quiet. And, as long as we have oats, they start no matter how cold it is! If I'm allowed to be nostalgic, I'd say, horses.

And you, Sophie? If you lived close enough to school, would you go with a horse-drawn van or in a beater? *In a storybook world? A heated sleigh, for sure. But I'd want my friends in that story too.*

*Weasel, Horse or Beater was inspired by interviewing Ken Sparrow and Keith Tufts.*

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