



Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated.

~ Confucius

6. THE LAWN MOWER

I pulled the mower out in to the driveway and located it sideways so it wouldn't roll down the slope. I pulled the wadded up piece of paper out of my pocket with the directions I had written down.

I pulled my red wagon out and lined it up with the back of the mower. I took the wagon handle and placed it low on the back of the mower. I sat down next to the mower and tried to determine

where to tie the handle. I wrapped the short section of white cotton rope around both stabilizing tubes, bringing a section through the wagon handle. I did my best at a square knot which I tied as a granny knot and then deliberately undid it, re-routing the rope under-over to make the square knot. I never could figure out why I couldn't tie the square knot first since every time I tried it, it turned out as a granny knot. Maybe it was because I was left handed.

I tested my tandem arrangement by climbing in the wagon and kneeling. I grabbed the handle assembly at the top to see if I could turn it, but there was no way of finding out until the wagon was under way. I would just have to test it.

I looked at the directions I wrote.

1. Tie wagon to mower
2. Start mower
3. Pull lever to move
4. Jump in the wagon
5. Take off!

A moment of apprehension stopped me and I sat down in the wagon. Was there something I was missing? I was planning on riding down to the end of the street, a cul de sac, and coming back. Will it stay running? Will my wagon overturn?

No, it will be fine.

I grabbed the pull cord and yanked. The cord wouldn't move at all. What was I doing wrong? I pulled harder. The cord moved about 2 inches. I pulled again. 3 inches. When I watched my brother start the mower, it looked easy! Disappointment soaked my excitement. I sat down in the wagon.

"Lisa what are you doing?" came a voice from behind me. Startled, I turned to see Will, a friend who lived across the street.

"You scared me!" I said.

"What are you doing with that lawn mower?" Will said.

"Don't tell anyone, Will."

"How can I tell anyone if I don't know what you are doing?" Will was 2 years older than I was, but with the same slim build as mine. His shock of blonde hair flopped across his forehead and stuck up straight on the top of his head looking like he just woke up. His bright blue eyes gazed out of a face full of freckles.

"I'm trying to start this thing."

"Uh oh." Will saw the red wagon. "You're gonna get in trouble with that."

"Don't tell!"

"I won't! But someone is going to see you for sure."

"Will, here, come on, I can't start it, the pull cord is stuck or something. What do you think is wrong with it?" I grabbed the pull cord and yanked. The cord came out 2 inches from the top of the engine case and stopped.

"Oboy, will I get in trouble." Will looked carefully at the choke lever, and switches. "Well, for one thing, if you had started it, you wouldn't have gone very far. The fuel selector is set to OFF."

"It's not in my notes. No wonder."

He moved the switch to ON. "Stand back," Will said as he struggled with the pull cord. It came all the way out and the engine turned over but did not start.

"Wow!" I exclaimed. "How did you do that?"

Will pulled the cord a second time, faster. The engine sounded like it was going to catch. On the third pull, the Toro roared to life. Will grinned and said something to me, but I couldn't hear him. Debris from under the mower was redistributing itself across the driveway and spraying into our faces.

"Thanks!" I shouted as I jumped in my wagon. I pulled the traction engage lever to the first stop and the mower moved forward with a jerk, causing me to fall backwards into the wagon. I got back on

my knees and grabbed the mower handle to steer. The rope went taut and away I went, down the driveway towards the street.

Will stood in the driveway, shaking his head in disbelief and shouting something I couldn't hear.

The mower picked up speed on the driveway slope and I had just enough room to turn the Toro into the street.

My trepidation gave way to jubilation. I yelled out "Yay!" and looked down the street. The mower was chewing up leaves and small stones, spitting them out the discharge chute. Dust and debris spewed from the blade casings, filling the air behind me with a dust cloud.

I looked at the traction lever and moved it to "2." Now I was really flying down the road, towards the cul de sac, where I would have room to turn around. I forgot about the racket and flying pebbles as I felt the breeze in my hair and watched the landscape go by at 4 MPH.

Success!

I heard shouting behind me over the roar of the mower. I looked back up the street and saw Mr. Hunter, a neighbor, come running down his driveway behind me. My mower powered wagon wasn't fast enough to outrun Mr. Hunter. I thought about putting in more power to escape.

"Hey! Hey, hey," said Mr. Hunter as he caught up with me.

"Stop! Stop! Stop! He said.

"Hey, hey, hey!" Mr. Hunter's eyes bulged and his mouth was wide open as he shouted at me.

I wondered if Mr. Hunter always said things in threes. I pulled the traction lever to stop. The mower's forward motion stopped so fast I fell forward in my wagon and nearly fell over into the street. I hit my knee hard on the side of the wagon and winced.

Mr. Hunter reached me and grabbed my arm and the mower

handle. He looked at the handle and pushed the OFF button. The engine sputtered and died.

Oh gee, great, how am I going to get this thing started again.

“This is dangerous!” said Mr. Hunter. “Do your parents know where you are?” His eyes were wide with panic. His breath came in spurts as he blurted the words. I got the feeling he didn’t go jogging very often.

I sat in my red wagon, quiet, my knee throbbing. I was speechless again. This is always what happened, I just couldn’t figure out what to say or do when confronted with an angry adult.

Will came running down the street, stopping in front of us.

“Will, you need to help this little girl get back to her house with this.”

Mr. Hunter turned back towards me.

“Are your parents home?”

“My mom is home.”

“Where is your dad?”

“I don’t have a dad.”

“What do you mean you don’t have a dad?”

“He is not with us anymore.”

“Oh, I’m sorry!”

“No, I mean he lives in the city, he left us to be with someone else.”

“You mean he divorced your mom.”

“That’s it.”

“Ok, well, William can help you get this back home. This not safe. See the blades under that cover?”

He pointed to the mower casing. “The blades are always going, and

if the machine overturns and hits you, it would be a very bad accident. It could even kill you. Will you promise not to do this again?"

"OK, I said. I looked down at the street and the areas of grass and debris scattered about.

Not.

I couldn't wait to get home, to get away, to stop being in trouble. My plan was perfect, except for Mr. Hunter having nothing else to do on a Saturday morning than to prevent a little girl from experimenting with machinery.

I got out of the wagon painfully, trying not to show I had bruised my knee. Will and I untied the wagon and he pushed the mower and I pulled the wagon back up the street to the house. Mr. Hunter stood in the middle of the street, watching us, shaking his head.

I hope he doesn't call Mom.

Well, you got out of that pretty good," said Will.

"Yeah, well if Mr. Hunter had more interesting things to do inside his house instead of running out here to stop me it would have been better. I was just getting going. I was going to continue to the turnaround circle and the end of the street and then come back up this way."

"It was fun, huh?"

"Great! It was great! Will, we need to make a machine that runs with an engine but it's safe and you and I can fit in it and go exploring."

"Just buy a motorized cart, a go cart, I've seen them," said Will, throwing his hands in the air. "You're making things too complicated."

"No. How am I going to buy a go cart? They must be at least a hundred dollars. Second, what fun is that? The fun part is making it."

Will looked at me and laughed. His blue eyes danced with amusement in a calming way.

We reached the driveway. I looked around to see if anyone was looking at us. The neighborhood was quiet and it looked like only Mr. Hunter had discovered my adventure. He was gone from the street.

“Come over to my house, Lisa. Let’s play in the fort after we put this back in your garage. Hopefully no one will know what you did.”

“Me? You helped!”

“I was afraid you were going to say that.”

We put the mower and the wagon back in the garage in the corner. I looked around. Except for the songbirds, the neighborhood was quiet, awaiting the hustle and bustle of weekend chores.

I sighed. Back to the drawing board.