

## The dangers that pass through town

On the  
Prairie Dog  
Steve Haynes



The tragic rail accident, explosion and fire in Canada last week gives us a glimpse of just how much danger passes through our towns every day.

The disaster in Lac-Megantic, Quebec, wiped out the historic downtown district, killing up to 50 people, some of whom have not yet been recovered. It happened when a 72-car train loaded with crude oil broke loose and ran downhill until it derailed on a curve in Lac-Megantic.

The ensuing fire and explosions were horrific, but the incident is far from isolated. Similar trains of oil, alcohol, dry fertilizer and random hazardous materials criss-cross our area, and the entire continent, each week. Oil is being loaded here and moved through each county.

Other shipments involve one or a few cars of chemicals, or single trucks moving on the highways. Nearly every town is visited, usually without notice. Until something goes wrong.

In Canada, the head of the railroad first blamed fire fighters who had put out a small blaze in one of the train's engines earlier that night. Before they left, they shut the engine down. A few days after the accident, someone asked whether the train's hand brakes had been set.

The answer was uncertain. The engineer and conductor should have set hand brakes on the engines and up to 11 cars, but no one could say if that had been done. If it was not, then after the engines were shut down, it was only a matter of time before the train's air brakes failed – and it rolled away.

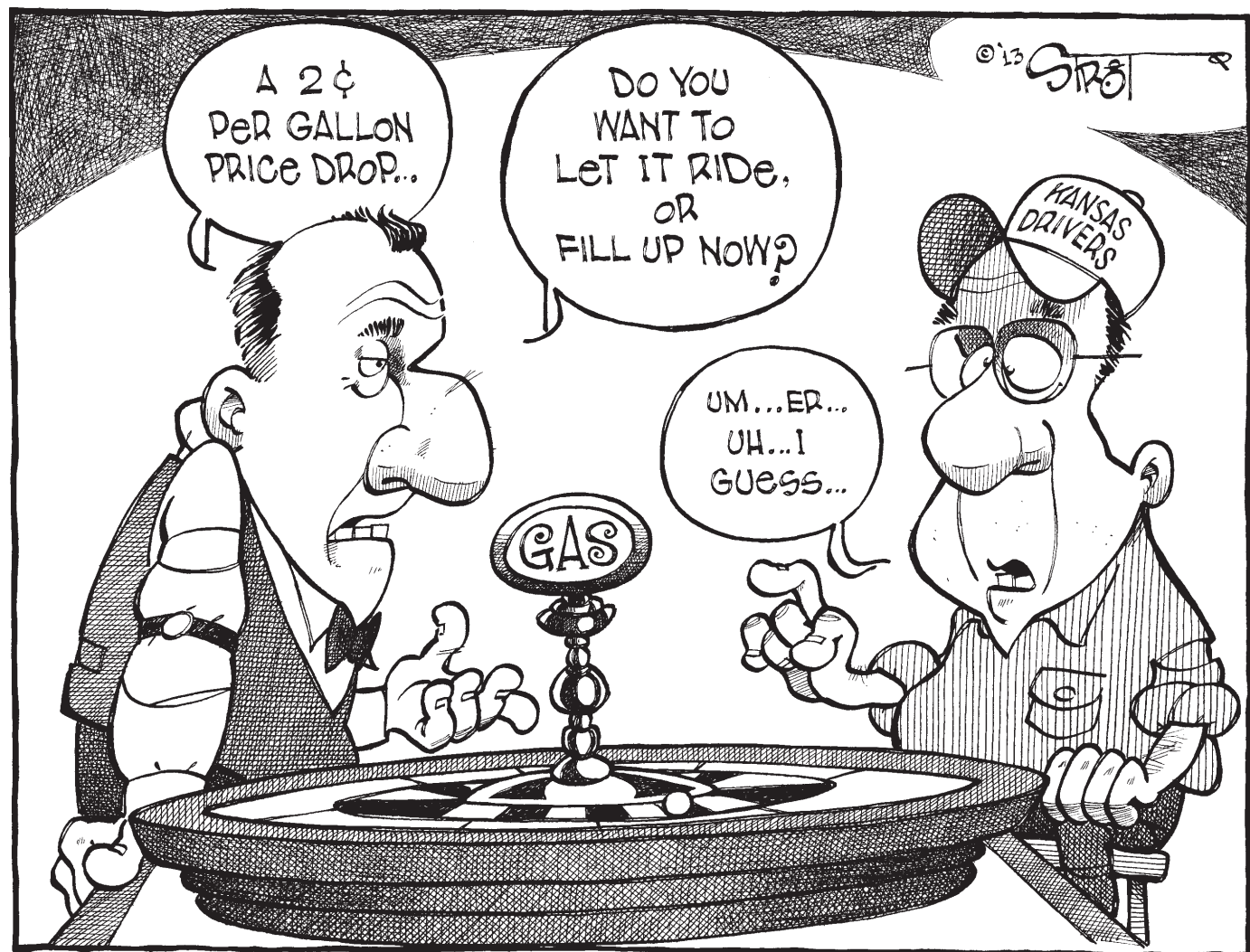
It's against railroad rules to leave a train standing with air brakes only, because eventually through leakage, they "bleed off." When that happens, there's nothing to hold a train except hand brakes, set by cranking a wheel on each car or engine.

Perhaps the Quebec accident will lead to better regulations and better training for crews. Perhaps the governments in the U.S. and Canada, which share a single unified rail network, will only invent some meaningless new paperwork for crews to fill out.

We hope for the former. There is too much hazardous material running up and down our roads and railroads to be comfortable with slipshod safety procedures.

If you don't believe that, go down to the nearest rail yard or highway intersection and count the number of "diamond"-shaped placards that mark hazardous loads. Be sure to write down the numbers; you can look them up on the Internet.

You'll see how lethal our transportation network can be. – Steve Haynes



## Facing our differences face to face

We sat in the hospital room listening to the father recount his own struggles with reading and his innovative coping skills. Like him, we had brought our young son to the University of California, San Francisco, in hopes of finding answers to the ongoing difficulties in school.

As a self employed contractor, the father still only read at about a fifth grade level, a level only recently acquired. Throughout the years, he had incorporated the help of a young friend to read his school work and later contracts and work agreements for him.

Even his wife was unaware of the depth of his reading problems, until he finally found the courage, after their own son began to struggle, to say, "I need help."

"I do not want our son to go through the things I went through," he told her and so began their journey to UCSF.

Ours began in a less dramatic way, but no less frightening as we watched our own son try to master the art of reading. He was creative, inquisitive

Phase II  
Mary Kay  
Woodyard



and could solve math problems beyond his years, but as a fourth grader, reading was a giant hurdle. What we didn't realize is what Jack and I would learn about ourselves in this brief encounter with another couple.

People thrust together in stressful circumstances develop a unique relationship in a short period of time. We talked about our other children. We shared the importance of our respective churches and the role our faith played in our lives, from raising children to facing the daily battles. Each day brought a new appreciation and awareness of the struggles facing each family. One thing was certain, each would make whatever sacrifices necessary for our children.

As the week continued, we were given the tools our children would need to better master reading. No, it wasn't an overnight accomplishment, but it was a step in the journey.

The greatest revelation, however was the one Jack and I discovered about ourselves. Throughout the week, we found we shared more similarities with the other family than differences. We had similar values, treasured family and friends, lived our lives in a similar fashion, but on the last day we discovered a difference which caught us unaware.

As we parted, the dad said, "Maybe we can get together again. If you are ever down here, call us or sometimes our church builds structures up in that area. Just look for the new Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses going in. That would be us."

As Author Nelson DeMille observed, "Somehow our devils are never quite what we expect when we meet them face to face." Mail to: mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net

Letter to the Editor,  
Getting out of a rut...

I very much appreciated the article by Laurie Cliff on small town living. I can relate. My family is also a transplant from a big city 20 years ago. The cultural differences cannot be over-stated.

We did not understand the rural community personality. I also think native Nortonites find us city folk a bit different as well. It's been difficult to understand and to be understood.

The same is true of Democrats and Republicans, Christians and unbelievers, church-ed-folks and non-church-ed folks, conformists and rebels, traditionalists and changers.

I am a slow learner. And it seems I have to relearn the most important things over and over again. One of them is, I don't know much...especially about the motives and inner heart of another human being. It is too mysterious, deep and private.

I want to understand people I don't understand. I want my eyes to be open to the diversity, complexity and beauty of people groups, families and individuals. Seeking to understand others and their viewpoints doesn't mean I have to give up or change my convictions, morals, or spiritual beliefs. Tho' I do need to be careful because as a human being I am vulnerable to influence.

We are all prone to getting into ruts of thinking. This thinking shapes our words, actions, beliefs and life course. I don't mind a few good ruts. Ruts that keep me headed in the direction I want to go. But most of the others are destructive, repeat thoughts based on hurt feelings, mis-understanding, and confusion. The thing about a rut is that it is formed from repeating the same thinking over a long time. So, how do we get out of destructive ruts?

We shake up the ant farm. Do new things. I am. And I tell you what, those ruts are getting smoothed over with new and positive experiences with the public, new friends and new goals. I also want to learn to dialogue with people in a way that encourages openness...regardless of opposing view points. I can always learn from those I don't fully agree with.

I've been too fast to judge, too arrogant, too set in my ways for too long. It's depressing, un-productive and lonely. I'm over the half century mark. And I don't want to 'get stuck in my ways'.

Robin Somers

## Being comfortable in our own skin

Dove soap has run some interesting commercials. One series featured men who are "comfortable in their own skin".

In another a police sketch artist draws two pictures of the same woman. One from how the woman describes herself and one from the description of someone who knows them. The sketch from the self- description is always less becoming and the woman looks older.

Two weeks ago I told of a woman who decided to live without enhancing her appearance. She gave up make-up and covered her head with a scarf.

We've always been fans of TLC's "What Not To Wear." A woman (rarely a man) is ambushed by WNTW's Stacey and Clinton. She is offered \$5000 to buy new clothes and given a makeover.

Sometimes the "victims" feel Stacey and Clinton are "cruel and mean." Sometimes they are. But I am sad to see this show end. There are several people I always intended to nominate. (If you are still wearing a mullet, it was probably you!)

The lady who chose to forgo make-up and pretty clothes and many of the women on WNTW see their decision to be natural as noble.

Many times the women will say, "It's more important what is inside." And it is!

This Too  
Shall Pass  
Nancy  
Hagman



Often they defend their clothing choices with "It's comfortable." I'm into comfort; the heels WNTW loves make me wince.

Sometimes they believe it just fits their lifestyle; which is the excuse I most closely identify with. I've never seen them do a Kansas farm wife. I don't always fix my hair when I run to town. Most of the time it's so windy, who could tell?

Many of the women claim not to care what people think. Hosts Stacey and Clinton usually get them to realize that appearance can hold us back in relationships and careers. I recently saw an episode where the woman had been fired from a job partially because of her clothing. It still took a lot of convincing to get her to change her ways.

It is disappointing when the "victims" get right to the edge and refuse to take the jump. It happens most often with hair. Listen up ladies, long hair parted down the middle is only cute up to middle school.

A person who is angry and the world judges them by appearance will not be attractive made-up or natural. Those who say they don't care what others think then make extreme choices, demanding others accept them, care!

A recent interview, with Dustin Hoffman about the movie "Tootsie", gives great insight into the importance of appearance. Hoffman tells us before going ahead with production of the movie, he was videotaped made up and dressed like a woman. He wanted to be certain those he interacted with would accept him as a woman.

But that was not enough, after seeing the tape, he told make up and wardrobe he wanted to be prettier.

When told "this is as good as it gets!" he went home and tearfully told his wife, "I know if I met myself at a party, I would never talk to that character because she doesn't fulfill physically the demands that we are brought up to think women have in order to ask them out."

Hoffman emotionally concluded the interview, "That was never a comedy for me."

Dove has tapped into an issue that affects us all. Anyone who is comfortable in their own skin shows it and they will be judged: BEAUTIFUL!

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