



Writer's Block

He Went The Extra Mile

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF
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Most people wouldn't go through hell or high water to get to their jobs.

But Mark Pischel went through a raging flood — and he did it every work day for nearly four months.

Pischel lived west of Niobrara, Neb., in an area known as Pischelville. He worked as a senior corrections officer at Mike Durfee State Prison (MDSP) in Springfield, just across the Missouri River in southeast South Dakota.

The commute would normally take 30 minutes using the Chief Standing Bear Memorial Bridge, but last year's historic Missouri River flood changed all of that. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers released water at 160,000 cubic feet per second — or 1.1 million gallons with every tick of the clock.

The floodwaters forced closure of stretches of Nebraska Highway 12 both east and west of Niobrara. The loss of the major travel artery forced workers into considering 85- to 100-mile commutes by way of the Fort Randall Dam bridge at Pickstown to the west or the Discovery Bridge at Yankton to the east.

Or, if you're like Pischel, you could go through the water. He became one of the legendary commuters — mostly Nebraskans headed to South Dakota — who used every conceivable means of transportation to reach their destination.

"It's frustrating, but you have to get to work and do your job," he told me in an interview.

For nearly an hour, he shared with me his dogged determination to overcome the flood and to teach the job that he loved despite its dangers. He also talked about his love for his home and his family, even inviting me to visit the area. And he showed a sense of humor, not taking life too seriously.

But now, his voice has been forever silenced.

The 54-year-old Pischel died Saturday at a Sioux City hospital. According to authorities, Pischel was driving his motorcycle on Nebraska Highway 14 when his rear tire blew out near Creighton, Neb. He was wearing a helmet, but his injuries proved fatal.

Funeral services are set for 10:30 a.m. today (Thursday) at St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church in Verdigre, Neb.

Pischel told me that he considered his co-workers to be family members. Fittingly, he received a tribute at the start of Monday's state Corrections Commission meeting at the Springfield prison.

South Dakota Corrections Secretary Dennis Kaemingk informed the board members of Pischel's death. According to the corrections secretary, Pischel was making the trip to get a tuxedo fitting for a friend's wedding when the fatal accident occurred on Pischel's ride home.

Pischel had worked 14 years at the prison, the corrections secretary said. Pischel's son, Dustin, has been a MDSP corrections officer since 2001.

"(Pischel) had tremendous respect for the office," Kaemingk said. "He had a tremendous love of life and a sense of humor."

Then, Kaemingk asked for a moment of silence. Afterwards, commission members cited the *Press & Dakotan* article about Pischel's determination to report for work despite flooding that literally created a major roadblock.

When the roadblocks went up during Highway 12 flooding, Mark Pischel resorted to boating part of the way. In the process, his 30-minute trip turned into a 45-minute commute.

"When you work overnight, you don't feel like driving home for two hours (by taking the long route) at 6 a.m.," he told me at the time. "And it would cost about \$35 per



Randy DOCKENDORF

vehicle each trip. It's close to \$80 to \$100 a week in fuel if we went the long way around. That's really tough, especially in times like these when people hold down two jobs to survive."

Pischel and three or four other commuters boated from Niobrara east to a stretch of road that remained open. They then picked up vehicles parked at an intersection and crossed Chief Standing Bear Memorial Bridge — which remained open for local traffic — for the remaining 13 miles to Springfield.

Pischel and his "carpool" worked the overnight shift starting at 10 p.m. Boating in the dark, they took advantage of reflectors left by another commuter to show the deepest river and the best route. They would use as many as 10 vehicles to get to work.

Pischel thought the creative commute would last a month. Instead, it ran the entire summer.

Still, there was something relaxing about life in the slow lane, Pischel said. That was especially true when he came home from the overnight shift at 6 a.m.

"This summer, I have already been on the river longer than I ever have before," he said at the time. "It's a shame, because every morning when we come home from work, we think that we should be fishing. But you're tired and just want to go home."

Pischel enjoyed the view on the boat ride home. "It's just absolutely beautiful, seeing the sun rise on the (Chief Standing Bear) bridge," he said.

While boating to and from work, Pischel found himself sharing the "carpool lane" with a variety of creatures such as deer and fish. He traveled within a few feet of muskrats and beavers who became accustomed to the people sharing their home. And the river became thick with carp and the sound of bullfrogs. On the other hand, Pischel stayed alert for loose cattails that could have snagged his boat.

Overcoming the river was nothing new for Pischel, who found creative ways to reach Springfield before Chief Standing Bear Memorial Bridge was opened in 1998. He had just been hired at the prison that year, and the bridge was scheduled to open in time for his job — but it wasn't quite finished.

"Back then, I was younger and more ambitious," he said. "I would take my motorcycle, load it in the boat, cruise across the river and then ride into town and let the boat sit on land."

Major differences existed between the two eras, Pischel said. Back in 1998, the river was almost too low for boating, compared to last year's flooding.

"And in ways, Springfield, South Dakota, was a country that I had never been to (before the bridge was built)," he said. "Now, I'm used to it and know where I need to go."

For the most part, Pischel found the water-land combination for his flood commute worked out pretty well, with the exception of some white caps during windy days and running into trash all over the river. He looked forward to commuting again on dry land when the flooding receded and Highway 12 was re-opened. But he said he would also miss the solitude of his twice-daily boat ride.

"You really want the flooding to be done," he said. "But as one of the guys said, it's also sad to see some of these (peaceful) things go away."

A year later, Pischel has found a different kind of peace. His family and friends will grieve at today's funeral, but they will also remember the man who enjoyed life to the fullest and on his own terms — even if, as in the case of the prolonged flooding, it meant taking a detour now and then.

You can follow Randy Dockendorf on Twitter at twitter.com/RDockendorf

Aren't We All Americans First?

BY LEE H. HAMILTON
Former member of Congress



Hamilton

I was first elected to Congress in 1964. That was the year Lyndon Johnson won a full term as president in a landslide. If ever a president had a popular mandate to pursue his goals, it was LBJ in the few years that followed that election.

Yet one of my strongest memories of him is not of a president reveling in partisan supremacy, but of his cautioning against it. Johnson used to love meeting with freshman members of Congress, and after taking office we Democrats who'd been elected along with him had every expectation that he would allow us to bask at the expense of our Republican colleagues. He didn't. "I'm an American first," he told us. "And I'm a Democrat second."

It was a bracing affirmation of a quality essential to national leadership — a firm conviction that the good of the country comes first, even if it runs counter to the interests of one's political party.

I can't help thinking of it today, in an era when deep, seemingly unbridgeable differences divide Democrats and Republicans, and when these divisions are being stoked by the current presidential campaign.

It has been apparent almost since the beginning that our nation's welfare rides on how well political leaders balance the needs of the country against their partisan goals. In 1796, preparing to step down from the presidency, George Washington devoted much of his Farewell Address to this question, and to the destructiveness of what he called "the fury of party spirit."

Surveying with alarm the regional discord and the growing hostility between Federalists and the Republicans that took hold in the final years of his second term, he set out to warn Americans that the very permanency of the Union depended on "a government for the whole."

Other national leaders understood the sentiment. Patrick Henry's famous statement, "United we stand, divided we fall" was followed by these words: "Let us not split into factions which must destroy that union upon which our existence hangs." Thomas Jefferson said in his first inaugural address: "We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists."

Each of these leaders signaled a bedrock belief in the im-

portance of working together to bridge differences and find common ground because the nation's welfare demanded it, regardless of the dictates of a party's extremes.

Now, I'm not urging that we be naive. We're not going to abolish parties, and we shouldn't. They help us organize our political choices, define and advocate issues, and make sense of elections.

But if we're not careful, they can be carried to such an extreme that they divide government, when what we need is unity of government. We need it in foreign affairs, where the more united we are as a nation, the stronger we are. And we need it in domestic policy, where excessive partisanship agitates the people and creates animosities among them. It leads to distrust within Congress, mistrust of Washington, weaker administration of government, and an inability to resolve the problems that press against our future. If you doubt any of this, just look around.

It is extraordinarily difficult to create a government that works together for the common good. One reason most presidents end up talking about the unity of the country and of government is because they, more than most of us, can see the centrifugal forces of region, ethnicity, religion and ideology at work. They know that there is no magic formula for balancing them all.

But in this era of unforgiving partisanship, it is too easy to forget the importance of trying — and of working hard not to fan the flames of divisiveness. It is crucial to avoid painting the other side as un-American or eager to betray the national interest, just as it is to recognize that we have more in common than we have differences.

Our differences are important; they are part of who we are as a nation. But if we want to overcome our challenges and preserve our greatness, unity is indispensable. The great work of our democracy, as it has been for more than 200 years, is learning how to reconcile the two.

Lee Hamilton is director of the Center on Congress at Indiana University. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years.

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OPINION | OTHER THOUGHTS

Political Conventions Still Have A Purpose

OMAHA (Neb.) WORLD-HERALD (Aug. 27): OK, so it's been a while since there was any real drama at a national political convention.

Back when, the Democrats could brawl for 16 days and 103 ballots (New York, 1924) in picking their nominee. Republicans (Chicago, 1912) could watch a slugfest between an incumbent president, William Howard Taft, and a former president, Theodore Roosevelt, that would leave the loser running anyway as a "Bull Moose."

But lately? Modern conventions pretty much are scripted coronations for nominees chosen months earlier in primaries and caucuses. Even the announcement of a vice presidential choice comes well before the convention opens.

So the major television networks, which once aired the events almost gavel-to-gavel, have pulled back. ABC, CBS and NBC are promising only three hours of coverage spread over the four nights of each convention — Republicans in Tampa, Fla. and Democrats in Charlotte, N.C.

But despite network TV's shrinking interest, the 2012 conventions may be more accessible to interested voters than ever. Newspapers will report on the events in detail, and there will be a new wave of live coverage utilizing the Internet, social media such as Facebook and Twitter, tablet computers and smartphones.

These conventions are an institution going back to the 1830s, yet many 21st-century Americans are still paying attention. For three convention nights over two weeks in 2008, more than 40 million people watched the speeches of Barack Obama, John McCain and Sarah Palin on television.

While it's easy to poke fun, these quadrennial pep rallies remain more than a place to see donkey jewelry and elephant hats. ...

Paralympic Problems

CALGARY (Alberta) HERALD (Aug. 27): The 2012 Summer Paralympics, opening in London, are at risk of straying from their noble origins forged in the very same city more than six decades ago.

Ludwig Guttmann, keen to showcase the rehabilitation of soldiers after the Second World War, organized the precursor to the Paralympics — a multi-sport competition between hospitals to coincide with the 1948 London Games.

The chairman of the 2012 London organizing committee, Sebastian Coe, went so far as to proclaim earlier this month, "We want to change public attitudes toward disability ..."

Although the practice is banned, it's common for Paralympians with spinal cord injuries to break their toes or even be jabbed with sharp needles in an effort to increase their blood pressure and improve athletic performance.

Dr. Andrei Krassioukov, a Vancouver researcher, estimates about 30 per cent of athletes at the London Paralympics could be involved in the nasty practice. Krassioukov has been working with the competitors for more than three decades and says that cardiovascular abilities must be added to the Paralympics' system for classifying athletes. Otherwise, he said, competitors are at risk of life-threatening strokes or brain aneurysms.

As well, if a ranking for cardiovascular abilities is added, athletes would be competing against others who perform at the same level as them, notes the doctor, reducing the temptation to elevate their blood pressure through such distasteful acts as twisting their testicles.

It's a common-sense solution that ensures athletes' safety and dignity.

TODAY IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press
Today is Thursday, Aug. 30, the 243rd day of 2012. There are 123 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On Aug. 30, 1862, Confederate forces won victories against the Union at the Second Battle of Bull Run in Manassas, Va., and the Battle of Richmond in Kentucky.

On this date: In 1797, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, creator of "Frankenstein," was born in London.

In 1861, Union Gen. John C. Fremont instituted martial law in Missouri and declared slaves there to be free. (However, Fremont's emancipation order was countermanded by President Abraham Lincoln.)

In 1905, Ty Cobb made his major-league debut as a player for the Detroit Tigers, hitting a double in his first at-bat in a game against the New York Highlanders. (The Tigers won, 5-3.)

In 1941, during World War II, German forces approaching Leningrad cut off the remaining rail line out of the city.

In 1963, the "Hot Line" communications link between Washington and Moscow went into operation.

In 1967, the Senate confirmed the appointment of Thurgood Marshall as the first black justice on the U.S. Supreme Court.

In 1983, Guion S. Bluford Jr. became the first black American astronaut to travel in space as he blasted off aboard the *Challenger*.

In 1986, Soviet authorities arrested Nicholas Daniloff, a correspondent for *U.S. News and World Report*, as a spy a week after American officials arrested Gennadiy Zakharov, a Soviet employee of the United Nations, on espionage charges in New York. (Both men were later released.)

In 1987, a redesigned space shuttle booster, created in the wake of the Challenger disaster, roared into life in its first full-scale test-firing near Brigham City, Utah.

In 1991, Azerbaijan declared its independence, joining the stampede of republics seeking to secede from the Soviet Union.

In 1992, the television series "Northern Exposure" won six Emmy Awards, including best drama series, while "Murphy Brown" received three Emmys, including best comedy series, in a ceremony marked by satirical jabs directed at Vice President Dan Quayle.

In 1997, Americans received word of

the car crash in Paris that claimed the lives of Princess Diana, Dodi Fayed and their driver, Henri Paul. (Because of the time difference, it was Aug. 31 where the crash occurred.)

Ten years ago: With just hours to spare, baseball averted a strike; it was the first time since 1970 that players and owners had agreed to a new collective bargaining agreement without a work stoppage.

Movie director J. Lee Thompson ("The Guns of Navarone") died in Sooke, British Columbia, Canada at age 88.

Five years ago: In a serious breach of nuclear security, a B-52 bomber armed with six nuclear warheads flew cross-country unnoticed; the Air Force later punished 70 people. Taliban militants in Afghanistan released the last seven of its South Korean hostages.

One year ago: National Guard helicopters rushed food and water to a dozen cut-off Vermont towns after the rainy remnants of Hurricane Irene washed out roads and bridges in a deluge that had taken many people in the landlocked New England state by surprise. Libyan rebels said they were closing in on Moammar Gadhafi and issued an ultimatum to loyalists in his hometown of Sirte, his main remaining bastion: Surrender, or face an attack.

Today's Birthdays: Opera singer Regina Resnik is 90. Actor Bill Daily is 85. Actress Elizabeth Ashley is 73. Actor Ben Jones is 71. Cartoonist R. Crumb is 69. Olympic gold medal skier Jean-Claude Killy is 69. Actress Peggy Lipton is 65. Comedian Lewis Black is 64. Actor Timothy Bottoms is 61. Actor David Paymer is 58. Jazz musician Gerald Albright is 55. Actor Michael Chiklis is 49. Music producer Robert Clivillés is 48. Actress Michael Michele is 46. Country musician Geoff Firebaugh is 44. Country singer Sherrie Austin is 41. Rock singer-musician Lars Frederiksen (Rancid) is 41. Actress Cameron Diaz is 40. Rock musician Leon Caffrey (Space) is 39. TV personality Lisa Ling is 39. Rock singer-musician Aaron Barrett (Reel Big Fish) is 38. Actor Michael Gladis is 35. Rock musician Matt Taul (Tantric; Days of the New) is 34. Tennis player Andy Roddick is 30. Rock musician Ryan Ross is 26. Actor Cameron Finley is 25.

Thought for Today: "If you board the wrong train, it is no use running along the corridor in the other direction." — Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German theologian (1906-1945).

FROM THE BIBLE

Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him. Romans 6:8. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

YOUR LETTERS

Derby Success
John Jussel and Brian Muehlbeier, Yankton
Boy Scout Troop 102
On behalf of Troop 102, we would like to thank all of the busi-

nesses and individuals that supported our 2012 Riverboat Days Fascar Classic pinewood derby race. We had fun building and racing the cars. Your generous donations will help fund various scouting activities.

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