

[Editor Note: This commentary originally was printed in the New Jersey RLCA State Newspaper and was reprinted in the National RLCA Magazine as one of only a few times when bylined articles were printed in the RLCA Magazine. Two postal districts and two postal area offices requested permission to print and distribute to all employees if I eliminated the last paragraph. I categorically refused and USPS never printed the commentary.]

### **Please, make a pledge with me!**

By John Amtsfeld

Long ago when I worked in the steel mills, I saw so many people who had lost fingers or were otherwise permanently injured and I recognized how dangerous it was to work in some of the professions I worked in. I made a pledge every morning that I wanted to come home the same way that I went to work. To the point where I promised myself that I would not take any chances and I would work safely.

It started when I made the promise to myself in the mirror before I went to work or when I punched in. I did it every day.

In my day, I worked in steel mills, brick plants, tire plants, molding factories, warehouses, with deadly chemicals, in truck yards, plumbing, etc. and other than back strain have never had a major industrial injury.

I have also worked numerous jobs involving driving including over 26 years as a rural letter carrier. Safety is so inbred into my routine, that I check my mirrors as second nature. I always know where the traffic is around me and I assume that every other driver on the road is a maniac. I have never had an accident while carrying mail.

I check my mirrors when I stop at a mailbox, again as I am fingering my mail, again as I am placing it in the box, again as I am closing the door and again as I prepare to go to the next box.

I always assume that the one time I do not shut my engine off when I leave the truck, it will roll away. I assume that the one time I do not put my seatbelt on is the one time I will be rear-ended by a Dump truck hauling quarry stone and exceeding the speed limit by 20 miles per hour. I assume that the one time I believe that the approaching car with a turn signal on is actually going to make his turn so that I can make my turn will be the one time the other car goes straight.

I believe that the one time that I try to load my truck in three trips by picking up multiple trays, will be the one time my back is tired and will end up going in three different directions.

I am not writing this for any other reason than rural carriers are being maimed and killed in alarming numbers. It's happening in clear, dry weather in the bright sunlight on light days.

In fact, it is more likely to happen on days when the weather is fine and the mail is light. This year with the mild winter, we are dropping like flies.

Rural Carriers, friends, are being killed unnecessarily and/or permanently injured in accidents where they will never again be able to carry mail or work as a rural letter carrier.

When the number of accidents increases as dramatically as it does without weather or other factors to point to; it means only one thing. We are not alert.

Our job can be repetitive and it is very easy to let your attention drift or to fail to pay attention to safety. What we've done 5,000 times before could be the one final moment where we should have done something different.

In one instant, if you have not taken precautions or exercised due diligence in being alert, everything in your life can change.

When you are involved in a major accident, if it was on the job, you are covered by OWCP. It takes OWCP a minimum of 90-120 days to just consider your claim. Sure you may qualify for 45 days of continuation of pay, but after that you are on your own.

The burden may fall on your spouse to make up for what you will not be able to do, maybe forever.

There will be untold medical bills for operations and lengthy recuperation periods and you will never be the same.

If you are unable to fully recover, you will be placed in another job consistent with your restrictions and more than likely it will be as a PTF clerk on the bottom of the seniority list. Every bit of this will be a nightmare for you.

You will relive the moments of the accident endlessly wishing that you had done this or done that.

Untold stress will be placed on your spouse and your children and your family will never be the same.

Your relationship with your co-workers will change as will your relationship with your managers.

Everyone will believe that you are somehow goldbricking.

Take a moment and think of all that you have and where you are now. Picture how that would change if you were disabled. Nothing good will come out of your visions.

Please! PLEASE! Begin to pledge to yourself that you will come home everyday the same way you went to work. That you will commit inside your head to safety so completely that it becomes second nature. You will take the extra moment to ensure that you are safe and you will do absolutely nothing to work unsafely.

You will come to discover that when your safety is second nature, it doesn't really take a lot of extra time and those few precious moments are an investment in yourself and your family.

Believe, as I do, that every other driver on the road is out to get you. They are all crazy and try to imagine what crazy thing they will do next and be prepared when they do it. In these days of road rage, don't let that lunatic with the short fuse add you to his/her list of victims.

Love your family with all of your heart and respect your co-workers by doing everything you can to work safely. Don't do it only for the Postal Service, they can always plug someone else into your job.

Do it for your self, for your family and for my sanity.

Give your family the greatest gift that you can by making sure that you come home safely every day.

Make sure that when the day comes when you can retire, that you are able to retire and enjoy all of the things you have worked a lifetime to enjoy.

Don't just set this aside as a clever little article. I am pleading with you to think of yourself. You do not want this thing to happen and it will if you don't make the personal commitment to work safely.

If you do these simple things that I am suggesting, I guarantee you that all of the tears, all of the excruciating pain and all of the heartache will not come to you. That accident that is just waiting for you will pass you by because you saw it first.

Please start today and do it everyday until it becomes second nature. If you have an accident, call a union steward right away!

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