

from other pens...

Bridges aren't all we need to inspect

When the bridge collapsed in Minneapolis claiming 13 lives, every bridge in America, so it seemed, came under suspicion. Prior to that tragedy we, as the traveling public, probably never gave bridge safety a second thought.

Now, bridges all over the country have been or will be inspected. Thousands of bridges are involved.

Another possible tragedy waits in the wings. And it has nothing to do with traveling, other than getting to the site, or sites.

While watching the Oregon-Michigan football game on television Saturday afternoon at Ann Arbor, Mich., and hearing the announcer give the attendance at 109,000, we got to thinking.

The stadium in which the Michigan Wolverines play is old — how many years would be a guess — but it's old. And it's one of the largest, perhaps the largest, college stadiums in the country.

As we watched the partisan crowd come to its feet when it looked like Michigan might do something, the thought crossed our mind: How safe are those old stadiums? How often are they inspected? Can they continue to endure the jumping up and down and the foot stomping of thousands of fans on Saturday afternoons each season?

The Notre Dame stadium, increased in size a few years ago, is huge and it is also old. On a smaller scale, Memorial Stadium at the University of Kansas has been around for many years, too. And there are many more.

Like bridges, they are made of concrete and steel, materials that can last many years, but can turn deadly with little or no notice.

We would guess football stadiums are inspected regularly, or should be. They are places that bring people together in large numbers and in an atmosphere of joy and excitement. They're safe.

But trusting motorists in Minneapolis thought the same thing.

— Tom Dreiling, *The Norton Telegram*

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Wildlife was better than party animals

There were some real party animals at Steve's class reunion this weekend, but I was more interested in the wildlife we saw between Wednesday night and Sunday.

We were supposed to leave for Emporia and the reunion on Wednesday, but I wasn't done with my office work, so we put off the trip a day. Our room at this sister's cabin at the lake would not go away.

As I prepared to leave the office Wednesday night about 11 p.m., Steve brought me a present — a little toad. He was a wonderfully bumpy, jumpy specimen and I was excited to take him home and let him go in the garden. The only problem was I had my car. Steering a car with one hand and holding a toad in the other is not recommended by most driving teachers. However, it was after 11 p.m., and I was the only one on the road for the five-block trip.

I figured our garden was a better place for him than the brick downtown.

The next morning, we loaded the truck and headed out. We had gone about half a mile when I was telling Steve that I had packed four days worth of dog food even though we would only be gone three.

"Dog," I screamed. "We forgot the dog!"

Animals are always the last things to go in the vehicle. We weren't planning to take the cats on



cynthia haynes

• open season

such a short trip, but the dog loves the lake. She can run and jump in the water, then run some more then jump in and start all over again.

We quickly backtracked and put Annie in her kennel, which we had packed.

Since our journey was running a little late, we headed straight for Lawrence to take our son out to supper. We had been planning on driving up to Lawrence from the lake but, hey, we were flexible.

The trip was reasonably uneventful once we got going, and we had a great time with son and his cat and his roommate's cat, which we had never met. While son's cat Frank is laid back, this new cat Ophrah is not. Still, we both got to give her a quick pet before she hissed and dashed off under a bed.

After leaving son's house, we headed out of Lawrence only to have to slow down for several squirrels and an opossum crossing the street between fraternities. The opossum looked really confused. The squirrels were

just, well, squirrely. On was carrying a nut in his teeth.

We had just gotten off the turnpike at the Emporia exit and turned onto U.S. 50 when we spotted a young coyote in the middle of our lane. We slowed down, expecting him to take off. We had to stop and honking at him before he would move away from the road kill on which he had been feasting.

Our estimation of his life span is not great unless he learns that most vehicles do not come up and honk at hungry coyotes.

Other wildlife encountered on our trip included a mother and two baby skunks. We were in the car and they were off the side of the road, which turned out to be a good thing for all concerned.

We also spotted numerous hawks, crows, jays, wrens and young pheasants. We even saw a box turtle sitting on the side of the road.

At son's house, a praying mantis was waiting for bugs beside the door. He wasn't quite as much fun as the tarantula we petted last week on the way home from Colorado, but you take what you can get in the insect world. Come to think of it, so does the mantis.

Or maybe he just takes what he can pray for. Or prey for.

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The Craig affair: Rampant hypocrisy

Listening to Idaho Republican Senator Larry Craig proclaim in near-thundering terms that he is not gay and never has been gay, I couldn't help but recall hearing Bill Clinton swear he "did not have sex with that woman."

All Craig lacked to enforce the comparison was a finger wiggling at the camera. In his case, there was also no trace of bodily fluids on anyone's dress to prove his guilt, but then there was that guilty plea admitting that he had engaged in disorderly conduct in a men's room at the Minneapolis-St. Paul airport, thereby avoiding admitting that he originally had been charged with soliciting a homosexual encounter with an undercover police officer.

Craig now says he pled guilty simply to get the matter out of the way, but surely as a lawmaker he had to know that he could easily have pleaded nolo contendere (no contest) without owning up to having been a bad boy and having that damning guilty plea on the record.

The media has jumped on this story as if the senator were Paris Hilton in drag. Aside from the ribald comments it has provoked, such as Jay Leno's remark to Sen. John McCain — who had said that his colleagues don't socialize with one another — that his lonely fellow senators could always find companionship in airport men's rooms.

When they involve politics, scandals such as this one are certain to find partisanship rearing its head, and the Craig affair is no exception. Because Larry Craig is a staunch conservative from a staunchly conservative state, Democrats and their leftist allies are dancing in the streets over his embarrassment, busily reminding every sympathetic reporter who will listen to them that the Idaho Senator not only espouses family values, but has been a staunch foe of gay marriage.

Ergo, he's not only a closet men's room lothario, but a hypocrite as well. It's a case of "don't do as I do, do as I say."

As tempting a target as Craig may be, however, it's interesting how gingerly the overwhelmingly pro-gay media have approached the subject of his alleged homosexuality.

Except for the more-militant gay activists, at least one of which has charged in unprintable language that Craig isn't really gay, he just likes to have gay sex, most of the media have avoided any hint that in reporting on the scandal they find Craig's suspected homosexuality



michael reagan

• making sense

objectionable.

In other words, if he really is gay, that fact itself is off limits. As Jerry Seinfeld used to say after mentioning homosexuality with something less than approval, "Not that there's anything wrong with that."

In the media's eyes, however, there is a lot wrong with a closet gay criticizing gay marriage or promoting family values which they see as code for condemning homosexuality and gays.

Democrats and the media define Craig as a hypocrite. By their twisted logic, therefore,

anybody who espouses traditional Judeo-Christian values must also be a hypocrite.

As a result, the Craig affair is providing Democrats with an opportunity to attack conservative proponents of traditional family values and conservative foes of gay marriage as a bunch of hypocrites, thereby hoping to deprive the GOP of a pair of politically potent issues.

Democrats want the public to believe that Craig is a hypocrite who speaks one way and acts in another — appearing to be a practicing heterosexual when he is in reality a closet gay — not, they'll hasten to say, that there's anything wrong with that.

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