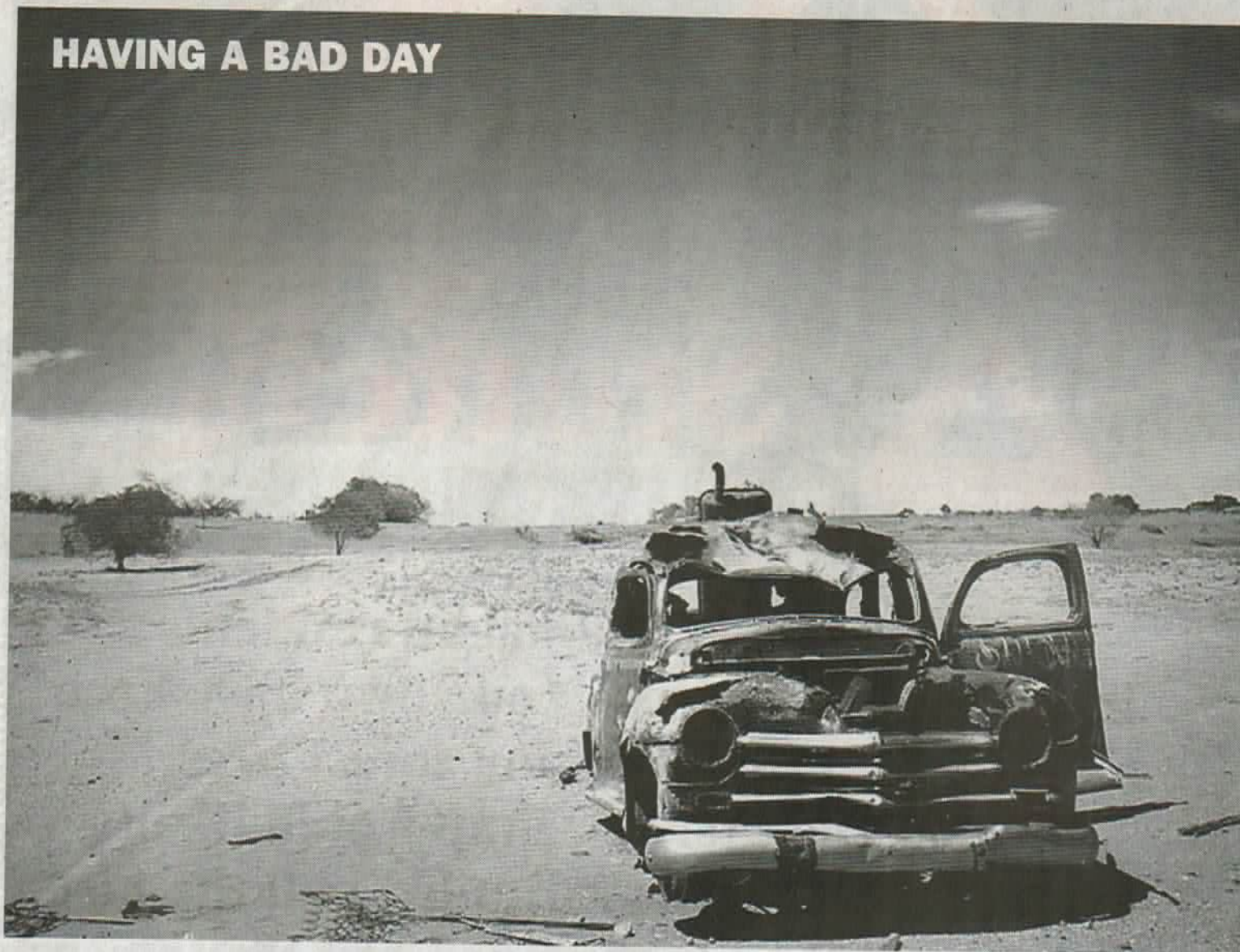


OPINION

The Okanagan Sunday, July 26, 2009

HAVING A BAD DAY



The world through a fellow human's lenses

We all have good and bad things happen to us. Some say it's karma, luck of the draw or just be-



the car and move it.

By this time, the northbound lanes were diverted by RCMP to Lakeshore and a police

We all have good and bad things happen to us. Some say it's karma, luck of the draw or just because.

We all have options in how we react and the option to learn something from the situation. I have three such events to share drawn from just a week in my family's life.

As each unfolded, I realized I must stay calm and reminded myself that people are, for the most part, kind and honest.

From a safety, emotional and security perspective, each situation would have been substantially impacted if I was a person with a disability. I thought what it might have been like if I lived with a visual challenge, in a wheelchair or had a developmental disability. It is important that you draw your own conclusions. Imagine what you would do.

I'm not sure if there is a right or wrong, but you may find your own right and wrong.

These are all real situations that we may just learn something from.

1) Imagine sleeping in your home on a hot (non air-conditioned) summer evening; fans blowing cool air over you as you rest. Your furry beasts (hot dogs) are sleeping on the ground by your feet, trying to pant their way into a cool rest. Your children are also asleep in their beds; the doors are locked, just like every other night.

You awake early to go waterskiing and, as you go through to wake up the family, you notice a few things out of place. At second glance, you notice the laundry room's window screen is crumpled, a bottle broken on the floor in front of the fridge, shoes have been rummaged through and left on the floor.

You open the door to your daughter's suite and realize with the disarray in her living room, her wardrobe torn apart and laptop gone that you have been broken into.

Now everyone is up. You deduce the thief must have broken in between midnight and 6 a.m. and been rather small, as the window they entered through is not huge.

After a look round the neighbourhood, you realize they rummaged through many neighbours' cars as well, looking for money, drugs or items they could sell.

This is not a unique situation, just the first time it has happened in our home. The worst part was that a stranger, who was a predator, helped themselves into our home and to our rooms while slept.

What if our ex-Okanagan Sun football-playing son awoke as he slept downstairs? What could have happened then?

What if I had a visual disability that did not allow me to see the thief nor know where they were in my home? What if our daughter with developmental disability was not at the summer games and awoke while the thief was rummaging through her room? What would she have done or said? What could have happened?

(Not for the squeamish)

2) I woke up last week not feeling 100 per cent. I had a busy morning with meetings planned so thought I would carry on, just not as quickly as usual.

After the first few meetings, the last being at City Hall, I started to walk across



ALLISON MCNEILL

Who's Challenge Is It Anyway?

Queensway feeling a bit faint. As I reached the other side of the street, I vomitted intensely. That carried on for a few minutes, at which time I made it to my car that was parked along that street. I sat with my head between my knees trying to gain composure.

Many people passed me by, not one stopped. In fact the only comments I did hear were of disgust and horror. Not one person asked if they could help me or get a glass of water or call someone to help.

I was totally dependant on others and helpless for a short while, and there was no-one to help, even if I could have asked.

I recalled a similar situation that happened to a good friend of mine at a conference last month. He happens to be visually challenged, which changed the situation tremendously.

After lunch, he excused himself to go the washroom and, after not seeing him for a few moments, we friends at his table realized there must be something wrong.

We asked a few fellow male delegates if they would check on him. As it turned out, he had had an accident and was not able to rectify the situation as he could not see, did not have a cellphone to call us, nor did he have a spare set of clothes.

What would you do if you came across someone in the washroom asking for help? Would you help them?

3) My husband and I both drive Volvo wagons and, when his car was making a sound a few days ago, he asked if we could trade cars, which we did.

I had to make one trip from my home office that day and started along Gordon Drive, going south. I was listening to the sound so intently that I missed my turn on Lexington and had to turn around.

As I was 80 per cent across Mission Creek Bridge going south, the back left tire literally flew off. I put the emergency flashers on, jumped out of the car and was assessing what had happened when I realized the tire was flying through the air right into the northbound biking lane - with a cyclist in it.

He missed the tire or the tire missed him (thank God), stopped and placed it on the ground.

By this time, traffic was backed up in both directions as I ran to fetch the tire put it on the back of the tailgate and called BCAA and my husband. It was then that I noticed what was going on in the cars going past me.

Other than several neighbours and friends who stopped over the 1 1/2 hours to help or see what I needed, most people going by stared at me, and one told me I should pick up

the car and move it.

By this time, the northbound lanes were diverted by RCMP to Lakeshore and a police car was parked behind my car with lights on - authenticating the scene, as if a tire sitting behind a car did not.

It amazed me that people were still screeching their tires and flipping me the bird and telling me where to go and how.

The common theme was that I had somehow put these people out and needed to be told that.

As I felt a victim of a mistake at the tire shop, I was not too happy about that, nor that most people were so unpleasant.

What if I had several children with me, some of whom had a disability and were not able to process the situation, needed medication or were not ambulatory? What would the passers-by have done then... I hate to imagine.

What do we learn from these situations?

What I learned was that we have somehow lost our respect for each other as humans. Whether ill and needing assistance, being broken into or getting angry when someone has put you out by their vehicle breaking down, where is the understanding human nature there?

Why are we all so busy that we can't slow down and help someone who needs help?

What about just saying hello to someone along your way whether they are in trouble or not? Especially if you don't know them. Especially if they have a disability.

There is a great new program through Community Living B.C. on this topic. It's called Start with Hi!

It is aimed to encourage typical folks to just say "Hi" to someone who they may not know who has a developmental disability.

A CLBC poll found safety is a huge issue in these people's lives and that knowing people gives security to them. They would feel safer and more included in their community if more people would just talk to them, ask how they are and be interested.

It could all just start with saying "Hi."

This is such a simple task, but means so very much. I encourage you to take a look online at www.StartWithHi.ca to see what experiences some folks have shared. It helps us see life from another perspective, through another set of eyes.

At the risk of being obnoxiously positive, these experiences have not soured me by any means.

In fact, I wake up the same way every day, looking forward to taking on the day and continuing to help make the world a better place.

Those of you who stopped on Gordon that day, thank you so much. For those who did not and had a negative comment, maybe think about that.

Some say I see life through rose-coloured glasses. I say I see life through many different sets of eyes and I am lucky!

Allison McNeill has a communications company in the Central Okanagan, is mom to four and step-mom to two, married to their father. She is Kelowna's Woman of the Year.

Email: info@misscommunicaitng.com.