Statewide Promotion of Traffic Safety

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Seventeen years ago I spoke on the general session program of the 24th Annual Purdue Road School on the subject “Promotion of Safety on the Highways”. Today, like the 17 year locust, I am back to plague you again. After such passage of years I doubt that anything I say will seem repetitive but if it does it is because the situation today resembles in many ways that of 17 years ago. It is not a case of history repeating itself. The problem has not returned. It is still here.

When I was here in 1938, Indiana had 279 motor vehicles for each thousand persons—today it has over 400 per thousand.

Then, state highways carried an average of 1000 vehicles per day per mile—today it is over 2200.

At that time 60% of all traffic fatalities were on rural highways and 40% in cities and towns—last year 77% were rural and 23% urban.

In 1937 traffic fatalities in Indiana totaled 1367. The average for the 17 years since then is 1088. Last year’s 1077, the best since 1948, is about 1% below the 17 year average.

In 1937 Indiana’s traffic fatality rate was 15.4 per hundred million miles of vehicle travel—last year it was 6.2.

This last figure represents a tremendous accomplishment. No one can be sure how great for no one knows for sure how accidents and fatalities are affected by increased traffic density nor what the normal ratio of accident increase would be if left alone.

One thing we do know: an average of 1088 persons killed each year for 17 years is too many. We know, also, that the loss to Indiana citizens during that 17 year period from traffic accidents would pay the cost of our three proposed toll roads across the state and leave enough to pay the state budget for the next bi-ennium.

These 18,496 persons killed and the hundreds of thousands injured during that time are not just statistics. They are people. There is
hardly a person in this room whose family has not included one of these casualties. These cold figures represent broken homes, blasted careers, disfiguring and dismembering injuries, loss of income, fatherless children, years of suffering in hospitals. They also represent gross ignorance, foolish pride, selfishness and a reckless disregard for the rights of others.

Seventeen years ago I was pretty confident that we had the answer in the three E's of traffic safety—Engineering, Education and Enforcement. Since that time I have seen the three E's fight many losing battles with the three P's—Pressure, Prejudice and Politics. Like the boy in the Mark Twain story who ran away from home because his Dad was ignorant, obstinate and opinionated and returned three years later to be amazed at how much the old man had learned in three years, I am amazed at the number of things I knew then that “ain’t so” now and probably never were. No doubt most of you have experienced similar disillusionment. While I am still of the opinion that the three E's are an essential part of the correct approach, I have learned, as you have, that they are not enough. We also need Research, Planning, Administration, Legislation, Adjudication and Financing—to name only a few. Above all, we need continuity, in policy-making positions, of competent personnel.

It would be a waste of time to rehearse here the genesis of this traffic safety problem, how it grew and is still growing. Most of you have grown up with it. We are much more concerned today with Exodus—getting out of it, rather than how we got into it.

TODAY'S PROBLEM

A brief sketch of the problem, as it exists today, shows about 95,000 miles of roads and streets in various stages of improvement, carrying almost 2 million motor vehicles of Hoosier registry, in various states of repair; driven by over 2 million licensed Indiana drivers of various degrees of skill, judgment and sobriety.

These highways are administered and controlled by over 3,000 elected and appointed officials of state, county and city government, who are an average cross section of our population, people of varying degrees of preparation, capability and enthusiasm. To complicate things, we change many of these every four years and throw away the results of their experience.

We have, also, in Indiana, over 100 statewide organizations of civic minded, sincere people, each carrying on its own safety promotion effort, none attempting a full scale program, very few with any con-
tinuity of program and nearly all without any effort at coordination with each other.

Is it any wonder that there is a problem? Is it any wonder that there is confusion? Often it seems that we are all like the man standing in the middle of a 40 acre field with a rope in his hand. He didn't know whether he had found a halter or lost a cow.

Prof. Amos Neyhart in his Beecroft Award Lecture last year said: “In the past we have expected too much from our vehicles, roadways and enforcement officers and entirely too little from our drivers”.

I don’t agree completely with Professor Neyhart. I am not convinced that we have expected or received too much from our roadways. We cannot write off roads as an important factor in accidents. In spite of the marvelous strides made in modernizing our roads, road builders have always been under pressure and never quite able to catch up. I am sure you will all agree that there are thousands of road hazards remaining to be remedied.

So long as we have use for one-lane bridge signs, there are hazards.

So long as we have 25 or 30 m.p.h. curves mixed in with easier ones and unmarked for safe speeds, there are hazards.

Without attempting to exhaust the list of hazards of roadways these others deserve mention:

Narrow roads with ruts along the pavement edge.

Places where vehicles can slide off the road into a creek and drown the occupants.

Many thousands of miles of county roads entirely unmarked.

Opening newly surfaced roads to travel without center line or No Passing Zone markings.

Delayed highway lighting where it is obviously needed.

Lack of standardization and reflectorization of signs, and, what is perhaps the greatest roadway hazard of all, our delayed acceptance of the fact that providing for safe operation is as much a part of the job as provision of the facility itself.

Neither can we write off vehicles as a factor in accidents, and certainly a significant factor in the severity of accidents. You have no doubt heard of the woman driver looking at the crumpled fender where she had hit a parked car and asking, “What good is a fender that doesn’t fend?” In like manner, what good is a bumper that doesn’t absorb part of the shock?

Vehicle manufacturers have done an excellent job, equally as good as the road builders. However, when they concentrate on building doors that don’t fly open at the first impact; dashes and interiors without but-
tons and knobs that rip, tear and puncture; bumpers that will absorb part of the shock; crash pads and passenger barriers, instead of the eternal race for more horsepower, we will have fewer casualties. At our present rate it is probable that at least half of our motor vehicles will be in a serious crash within their life span. If this condition exists, and it does, why are they not built to absorb more of these forces? The argument that more horsepower enables us to sprint out of danger overlooks those thus encouraged to sprint into danger.

The Indiana record of the past three years shows some evidence of uncontrolled horsepower. In the state as a whole accidents in which the car left the roadway before the crash, most of which are due to speed too fast for conditions, accounted for 11.9% of all accidents in 1952; 12.5% in 1953 and 13.6% in 1954. Fatalities from such accidents were 22.1%, 24.6% and 28.7% for the same years.

Another place where too much use of horsepower shows up is in accidents on county roads where surfaces, width, alignment and signing are not up to state highway standards. All accidents on county roads, which in 1952 were 7.9% of the state total, were 9.6% in 1953 and 10.9% in 1954. Fatalities from these accidents in the same years were 13.9%, 15.3% and 18.0% respectively. This alarming shift in location should act as a spur to county road officials.

Perhaps it could be stated thus: more horsepower makes good drivers better and makes poor drivers worse. Much accent on ease of stopping with power brakes has made thousands believe that nature's laws of force and motion have been repealed and that they can stop much quicker.

**MOTOR VEHICLE DRIVERS**

Now, about our drivers, Mr. Neyhart said we have expected too little from them. I think we have expected more than we have any right to expect. We have sadly neglected the Education that must go with Engineering and Enforcement. We have developed many techniques and control devices but we never seem to get everything we have, applied at the same place and time.

People are, of course, the biggest factor in accidents. I am talking about people and not restricting it to drivers. We are the people. Each of us has many short-comings. No one fully understands what makes people act like people and, sadly enough, few of us in traffic safety work have tried to learn. Instead we cuss the damn fool driver. Maybe there is something wrong with us instead. There is a story told of the little girl who was used to riding with her Dad, who one
day went out riding with her Mother instead. On her return the father asked what they had seen. "Well, Daddy," she said, "we saw horses and chickens and cows—lots of cows and sheep but not one damn fool driver."

The people are our drivers, too. Over 2 million of them are licensed to drive in Indiana. These people, and remember, you and I are among them, have not been fully and properly informed about our traffic problem. It seems that everyone has his pet theory about one facet of the problem but what we need is more general knowledge about the whole problem. Maybe we are confusing them more than we are helping them. We certainly need an informed and orderly approach.

How, then, can we start to clear up this confusion?

We must start with the assumption that no one in possession of his senses really chooses to, or wants to have an accident. They either want to know, or they think they already know, how to drive safely. The greatest trouble with people is that they do not take an adult viewpoint of the problem and their part in it and they will not, or cannot, look objectively at their own failures. To get an orderly approach requires a high degree of leadership but more than that it calls for a high degree of followership. A general can't win a battle or even have a parade without an army following him. We need followers too, but we can't draft them. We can only persuade them and before we can do that we must get their respect. Respect can never be commanded or enforced, it must be earned. It will never be earned by adopting a "holier than thou" attitude and cussing the damn fool driver, nor by adopting the attitude of the Pharisees who thank God that they are not like other men. We must first confess our own sins and realize that All have sinned. Of course, drivers make stupid mistakes. We are all drivers, therefore, we make stupid mistakes, too.

Often, engineering improvements are made without following up, or preceding them, by informing the public how best to use them. New regulations are made but police do not follow up with enforcement. New drivers are required to learn and pass an examination on sign colors and shapes, then they run across square stop signs, round slow signs and octagonal speed limit signs. Plans for removing or correcting hazards are carefully worked out only to find the money all gone—due to lack of financing or budgeting.

Education is attempted by some who haven't kept abreast of changing conditions; statistics kept by police do not afford information sorely needed for engineering or education. At least one instance was reported last year where state highway workers took down speed
zone signs to grade road shoulders and state police arrested and a justice of the peace convicted a driver of disobeying signs that weren't there. We have read of a driver examiner losing his license for drunken driving, highway personnel fined for disregarding their own speed zones, policemen killed while violating traffic laws, a city Safety Council President arrested for drunken driving, a city school superintendent flatly refusing to permit at-the-wheel driver training in his city's schools and so on.

Is it any wonder that we have too few followers? All of this points to the need for coordination of safety activities so that we may earn the respect of those we would make followers.

For many years we have been telling the people what we thought they wanted to hear instead of giving them the whole truth. In the press, in speeches and on the air we have sounded off on the idea that most of our accidents are caused by drunks, morons, speed demons, hot rods, road hogs and screwballs and our audiences ate it up. They nodded their heads in agreement and let all of our teaching and preaching go in one ear and out the other because they did not fit any of these ill sounding names. But the plain, inescapable fact is that nice people have accidents, too, and cause them. Daily in Indiana many of our accidents, that occur at the rate of one every 6 minutes, involve those whom we call our best people: doctors, teachers, preachers, farmers, business executives, housewives, lawyers, insurance agents, public officials, most of whom do not fit our ill sounding names.

These people didn't want to kill anyone or injure themselves or others. They didn't want to have an accident. They didn't mean to break the law. Perhaps they didn't break a law since not all safe driving practices are written into law. But at the moment they either didn't see, didn't hear, didn't think, didn't know or didn't care enough to do their very best.

There must always be enforcement. I do not deny the existence of a criminal, lawless and reckless element that must be restrained but, we can't arrest all of these nice people, throw them in jail or take away their driving privilege. Even if we could take off the road every person involved in a reportable accident last year it wouldn't solve the problem. You can't change attitudes by punishment.

This brings up another bit of misleading information we have been peddling for many years—that about 10% of the drivers have nearly all the accidents. This is statistically true for any given year and makes the problem sound ridiculously simple—just take them off the road and solve the problem. What we have failed to put across
is that it is largely a different 10% each year. Remove every driver who had an accident last year and this year we will have about the same number of people having about the same number of accidents.

This would indicate that having accidents is purely a matter of chance or luck. It is true, that if we do certain things, the element of chance assures us of having accidents according to the law of averages. However, as we remove the things that cause accidents our chances diminish and it is possible for any individual to avoid accidents almost entirely. This puts it squarely up to us and whether we want to avoid them badly enough to do something about it.

While engaged in fleet safety work with large numbers of drivers under my supervision, all of whom had the same training and very close to the same skills, I could forecast on January 1st, with remarkable accuracy, how many drivers would go the entire year without accident, and be at least 75% correct on who they would be. This was not second sight. It was based on what we knew about each individual—his attitude, experience, judgment and how well he had banished accident causes from his driving habits. If we could know every driver in the state as well, we could foretell with some degree of accuracy who will have accidents this year.

It has always seemed to me an unusual circumstance that, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary, I have never yet heard any driver admit that he drives poorly. I presume if I were to press you, every driver here would be pleased to admit that he drives well and ready to challenge anyone that says otherwise. Yet, 10 out of every 100 of you will have an accident this year and at least 3 out of every 100 have already had theirs.

If we have an accident the first thing we do is to try to prove that it was entirely the fault of the other fellow and the other fellow is just as diligently trying to hang it onto us. If we discuss our accident at all, we search out a friend who can be relied upon to sympathize with our story. We give only those facts that are in our favor, coloring them up a little, and are careful to build up the other fellow's mistakes. Then we ask our friend for his opinion and if he values our friendship he had better agree with us. Finally, feeling secure in this un-biased opinion we exonerate ourselves of all blame. Unfortunately for us, judges and juries don't always accept our friend's opinion and we begin to see why they say justice is blind. The tragic thing is that no one will look objectively at himself.

We get into all sorts of senseless arguments over who are better drivers and who are the worst, as for example, that men are better
drivers than women. I have seen some very competent drivers in both sexes and of all ages and some very poor ones but, generally speaking, none of them are good drivers all the time. Some of the best make some stupid mistakes. Some who are first rate in most of their driving have some very unsafe habits which they don't even recognize as unsafe. They get by for years perhaps, making the same mistake until one day it is suddenly and finally too late to learn.

There isn't a person here, including your speaker, who doesn't make stupid mistakes in driving sometimes. You have all had that feeling of embarrassment that comes when you catch yourself "pulling a boner" and look around real quickly hoping no one you know saw you do it. But, I dare say that most of you have driving faults that you don't even recognize as faults because you have always driven that way. Multiply this by over 2 million drivers in Indiana and you begin to wonder not that 150,000 have accidents to report each year but that 1,850,000 don't have.

Another of our major faults is that so many of us look on driving as a matter of skill alone. Really, there is only a small group that fails to develop driving skill in a short time. Having developed some skill we feel that we have learned to drive and quit trying to learn. In addition to skill we need good habits, judgment (which comes from knowledge plus experience) and a good safety attitude.

I know of no religion that does not in its tenets, oppose the things that contribute so greatly to the individual's tendency to accidents—pride, arrogance, selfishness, intemperance, disregard of the welfare of others, anger, dishonesty and lawlessness. It is difficult to understand why religious leaders don't accept the opportunity to tie these vices into the results that are all around them.

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

With all of these many parts of the problem before us, what can we do about it?

First, some way must be found to get everyone to adopt a realistic attitude on speed. We Americans pride ourselves on our common sense, yet nothing could be less realistic than our attitude toward speed.

All except the fortunate few who have already attained this realistic attitude fall into one of three groups of drivers. Depending on which of the groups we are in we blame all of our traffic troubles on the others.

There is at the top a relatively small group whose members habitually drive at excessive speeds regardless of conditions. They spend most of their time cussing slow drivers.
At the other extreme are those who feel extremely self-righteous because they always travel at a much slower pace than the rest of the traffic and maintain that speed come hell or high water. They are so complacent and sometimes obstinate about their own so-called safe speed that it is almost impossible to move them from their pinnacle of self-righteousness. Yet, a slow car that creates excessive passing can be just as deadly as an extremely fast one that creates the same disturbance in the traffic stream.

In between these two extremes come the vast majority of drivers, many of whom drive according to the time rather than conditions. It should be obvious to anyone that conditions of weather, road, traffic, vehicle or the driver's own physical or mental state should determine the speed to be used. But this is the group most affected by the "hurry bug". These people are unable to unwind or relax. They hurry through their meals, dash from place to place, live in a constant state of agitation and cram their lives full of unimportant activity. They rarely allow themselves enough time. They invite all sorts of physical and mental ills, and, on the street or highway, they invite sudden death. They may be recognized by these five characteristics: excessive speed at times, speed too fast for conditions most of the time, following too closely, improper passing, and failure to yield the right of way. These are all part of the "in a hurry" complex.

It should be possible to develop a rational speed policy for ourselves. These things would certainly be contained in it:
- Driving within the range of our headlights at night.
- Driving by the speed signs and the speedometer in cities and towns.
- On highways—if many cars are passing you your speed is too slow—if you are passing many it is too fast.

If we try to waltz on a highway where everyone is doing the mambo we waltz to our death. We must adjust our speed to the tempo of the highway or our friends will follow us to the strains of a funeral dirge. In modern traffic it is a very short step indeed, from pave stone to tomb stone.

In organized effort we might profit from the example of large commercial fleets which have made more consistent gains in traffic safety than any other group of people. The operators of these fleets realized, long ago, the fact that they must reduce traffic accidents or be forced out of business. For many of them, the cost of traffic accidents was greater than the profit realized from the combined efforts of their entire personnel. They had to do something about it. As these companies worked on the problem there emerged a well balanced program—a nine point program of positive action that produced results.
Here it is:

1. A clear cut set of rules for safe operation.
2. Careful selection of drivers.
3. Thorough training.
4. Good sets of accident records.
5. Close supervision.
7. Good vehicle maintenance.
8. Recognition and awards.

It is interesting to note in this batting order that Penalties come last after other means have been exhausted. This is quite different from much of our public safety effort wherein we pass laws and then jump the seven intermediate steps and start arresting people.

There is nothing new or secret about this program of the fleet operators. It closely parallels the efforts of official programs. But we have been weak on the seven intermediate points.

We must first reach everyone with the necessary information, presented in such a way that it will be easily understood and voluntarily used in developing the two things that can't be taught—judgment and good attitude.

Judgment is developed from knowledge plus experience. We must be sure that each person receives the proper knowledge of laws and safe practices and so far as possible reach them with the combined experience of others so that they don't have to learn safety by accident.

Good attitude requires—
A sincere desire to improve.
Acceptance of individual responsibility.
Acceptance of the fact that all drivers have and acquire faults.
Willingness to look objectively at our own faults.
Willingness to accept instruction.

As each person is reached, their example becomes a strong influence in developing the same attitude in others.

Long experience in dealing with drivers teaches me that we don't change them by name-calling, fault-finding, fear of injury or arrests. It is done by a long, hard process of

1. Earning their confidence.
2. Giving them constructive information.
3. Showing them the benefits of the right way.
4. Appealing to their desire for praise and recognition.
5. Convincing them that driving is made up of—
   Knowing and obeying laws
   Knowledge of safe practices
   Skill
   Judgment
   Common sense
   Good citizenship

   Thus, through the individual, we build the community effort for safety. The proper safety climate for our state will come from a lot of people with a good safety attitude and the others catching it from them. Many persons in cities which haven’t had a traffic fatality for many years feel that their part of the safety problem of Indiana is all taken care of. It isn’t. We have to keep it that way and over and beyond the confines of our city limits lies a responsibility as good citizens to do what we can for the rest of the state. We do travel all over the state, you know. Often you have felt that you wanted to do something about it but what can one person or a small group do. Your effort looked feeble and of little consequence.

THE INDIANA TRAFFIC SAFETY FOUNDATION

That is one of the reasons why I am here and why I am with the Indiana Traffic Safety Foundation.

Early last year a small group of interested businessmen, seeing the terrific impact of our annual traffic spree on our daily lives, resolved to do something more than talk about it. Having seen the futility of individual effort alone, they sought to do collectively what they could not do singly. The result was the formation of Indiana Traffic Safety Foundation.

The objectives of the Foundation, simply stated, are: to foster and promote the mutual interests of the public, business, industrial, labor, agricultural, educational and civic organizations in the safe and efficient use of the motor vehicle on streets and highways.

The Foundation is the only, non-political, full time, traffic safety organization in the state. It derives its major support from large contributions of business and industry. We do, however, have individual memberships at $2 per year which afford an opportunity for anyone in the state to become a part of an organized statewide program.

We issue a bi-monthly publication to our members which gives accurate, reliable information concerning plans, programs and progress of traffic safety in Indiana. Soon we will furnish this publication to every student in high school driver training classes in Indiana in order
to get statewide coverage. While this is not the purpose of my visit here, you are cordially invited to become a member of the Foundation and help in this movement.

We try to promote and participate in research into traffic accident causes and to develop remedial measures. We promote safety contests and provide suitable awards. We are carrying on, through the various publicity media, a continuing program of public education. We know that at least 138 newspapers in 62 counties of the state are using our material regularly. It is used by many broadcasting companies and dozens of trade and industrial publications. Thus we reach each month a large segment of Indiana's 4 million people.

We are handling for the National Safety Council their Annual Traffic Safety Inventory for Indiana cities. We realize that the inventory is not perfect but it provides a means of measuring accomplishment of many things that are essential to a good safety climate. The Foundation gives awards to the leading cities in each population group.

We are exerting all the force we can to extend driver training at the wheel to all of our high schools. We are assisting local communities to form their own traffic safety groups, realizing that the state problem is composed of hundreds of community problems and its solution must include effort in every community. We shall continually work to coordinate unofficial groups into a unified program. In this we have no desire to destroy the identity or the initiative of the participating group but so far as possible to help guide their efforts into a statewide action plan.

Finally, being practical people, we envision the days when political changes in leadership cause upheavals in traffic safety personnel and policies. It is our hope that the Foundation may be maintained as a strong force with which to carry on programs during such upheavals.

The State Office of Traffic Safety has been doing and is doing a tremendous job of coordination of official activities. Indiana's official program is recognized as the nation's best. We work as closely as possible with them. It is our hope that we will, in time, get unofficial activities coordinated as well. Everyone realizes now that there are two separate spheres of responsibility for traffic safety—official and unofficial. Both have their limitations and both must work together before the job is done right.

To sum up in a few words some of my remarks may I leave this thought with you. When all is said and done our personal safety in traffic depends largely on LUCK. This sounds entirely out of char-
acter for a safety speaker but I don't mean luck in the ordinary sense of the word. I mean the LUCK OF SAFETY where—

L stands for love of our fellow man which makes us realize that we are our brother's keeper.

U is for understanding which enables us to make allowances for the faults and shortcomings of others.

C is for courtesy to all who share our highways with us and the courage it takes to yield to the discourteous even when it is our turn.

K is for knowledge of traffic laws and rules of safe operation; knowledge of what other drivers may be expected to do, and the knowledge that good drivers do some very stupid and deadly things unless they keep constantly alert.

When we have this LUCK OF SAFETY, we will have developed beyond question a good safety attitude and will be helping promote a better safety climate in our state.