

Sample Editorials

Editorial 1: The Dangers of the Selfie, Courier Editorial Staff, Sept. 20, 2015

The Courier: http://wfcourier.com/news/opinion/editorial/the-dangers-of-the-selfie/article_5eec703a-2bce-5d8f-a042-c00c928c42b7.html

All too frequently, common sense takes a holiday with a cellphone in hand.

According to the National Safety Council, an estimated 1.6 million accidents occur annually as distracted drivers text. The University of North Texas Health Science Center has determined 16,141 deaths occurred as a result of texting while driving.

Those are frightening statistics for anyone on the road who could become the victim of such wanton negligence.

But the dangers in the digital divide don't stop there. In this Age of Internet Narcissism, dozens of deaths annually have been attributed to selfies — self-portraits using cellphones often taken in unusual circumstances.

A North Carolina driver was killed when she crashed into a truck while posting a selfie of herself singing Pharrell Williams' "Happy." A pilot in Colorado lost control of his Cessna 150, killing himself and his passenger. A Puerto Rican musician died while taking a selfie on a motorcycle. A Polish couple crossed a safety barrier and fell off a cliff in Portugal while taking a selfie as their children watched.

Several instances of "death by selfie" occurred while the photographer inadvertently pulled the trigger of a loaded gun in the other hand.

Selfie sticks also figure in the carnage. One person was killed when he was struck by lightning. Another died after climbing atop a train when his selfie stick touched a high-voltage wire.

Russia announced a public campaign against selfies in dangerous situations after 10 reported deaths and 100 injuries this year. An official stated, "We would like to remind the citizens that the chase for 'likes' in social networks can lead to the road of death."

In Denver, officials closed a public park in late August after incidents involving individuals taking selfies with bears. That echoed an action at Banff National Park in Alberta, Canada, where a "bear bulletin" was issued to dissuade tourists from taking selfies with the animals alongside the road.

Earlier in the summer, rangers in Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming felt compelled to distribute pamphlets with an image of a man being gored and flung into the air by a bison. The animals, they noted, are "wild, unpredictable, and dangerous." They also weigh 3,500 pounds and have been clocked at 30 mph.

Three aborted Yellowstone selfies with bison could have added a new meaning to "photo bomb."

A 43-year-old Mississippi woman and her daughter were within 6 yards of a bison for their photo op when nature reared its ugly head. According to a park service

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statement, “They heard the bison’s footsteps moving toward them and started to run, but the bison caught the mother on the right side, lifted her up and tossed her with its head.”

She suffered only minor injuries. Other selfie-related incidents involved a 16-year-old Taiwanese girl and a 62-year-old Australian man being gored by bison.

In San Diego — in an extraordinarily stupid and expensive instance of a selfie — a man picked up a rattlesnake from the brush for his photo documentation. The snake gashed his arm. It took the anti-venom stock at two hospitals to save him. The bill was \$153,161.25, including \$83,341.25 for pharmacy costs.

While squirrels on the Wartburg College campus are legendary for their friendliness, a selfie with the rodents can pose a risk.

A Maine teenager in Florida to check out a college campus saw a squirrel sitting on a handrail in a park and took a selfie. The flash from the cellphone scared the squirrel, which climbed under his shirt and hung onto his back.

“I threw myself on the ground, and that scared him off,” said Brian Genest, whose mother captured the incident on Instagram.

An estimated one million selfies are taken daily. Time Magazine has even ranked the Top Selfie Spots in the world — Makati City and Pasig, the Philippines at No. 1, followed by Manhattan, Miami and Orange County, Calif.

Obviously, the vast majority of selfies aren’t hazardous to health — until the obsession becomes too adventurous. While the list of selfie-related accidents may seem stranger than fiction, the tragedy is that basic precautions to maintain life and limb were ignored in pursuit of a photo.

Editorial 2: Bring People Back to the River, Des Moines Register Editorial Staff, April 26, 2016

Des Moines Register,

<http://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/opinion/editorials/2016/04/25/editorial-bring-people-back-river/83503542/>

A Register staffer watched last week as kids played soccer along the banks of the Des Moines River, near the Rotary Riverwalk Playground. They ran up and down the bank as the ball rolled to the water’s edge.

Later, the staffer captured the orange ball bobbling below the Center Street Dam, caught in the rolling water. The children were gone.

All that the dam claimed this time was a ball. It hasn’t always turned out so well.

Since 1900, 12 people have been killed at the Center Street Dam. Three more have died downstream at the Scott Avenue Dam. Other people were rescued or survived close calls.

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Rarely do we have the chance to improve safety at the same time we can provide opportunities for recreation and development. Removing or altering the low-head dams would open a rush of possibilities.

The Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization has unveiled illustrations showing what the river could look like without the dams. All of the ideas maintain existing water levels above the Center Street Dam to support upstream recreation and water treatment.

The drawings (which are anything but set-in-stone plans) show exciting ideas and attractions. They show different channel options – a lazy river vs. a more challenging whitewater course, for example – and conditions along the river’s edge that vary from wild and natural to groomed lawns and concrete landings. But the most important thing the drawings show may not be immediately obvious: the tiny dots representing people.

They show people tubing through rapids. And people paddling through gentle drops. And people walking across boulders to cast a line. And people launching a motor boat from new access points. And people dining at outdoor cafes and food trucks near the riverbanks. And people flying kites and watching eagles. And people gathering at amphitheaters, picnic spots and walkways along the water.

People are drawn toward the water. Over the last 25 years, Des Moines civic and business leaders have done wonders – creating new parks, trails and other attractions – to open the river to people, instead of closing it off as it was for decades.

But the work is incomplete. The two dams create a no-man’s land in the heart of downtown, along the Principal Riverwalk. Sure, the falling water below the Women of Achievement Bridge makes a pretty picture. But imagine the photos and videos of people riding rapids under the same bridge and the attention that would create.

Dams across Iowa once produced power, and removing them is stirring up a different type of energy. Manchester, Charles City, and Elkader removed dams to create whitewater parks, which have attracted tourists who want to ride the rapids. But they’ve also created community gathering places as locals watch the excitement.

Des Moines could see similar results, but not multiplied. It won’t be cheap. The Manchester Whitewater Park cost \$2.5 million, and removing the two Des Moines dams and making other changes would cost five or 10 times that.

Before we get hung up on the cost, however, let’s explore the visions for the river. This process requires people. Get involved and provide input. Let’s imagine the possibilities – particularly the priceless opportunity for people to enjoy the river safely.