**FOREWARD: The following text was taken from a Mid-1920s issue of the Kankakee Daily Republican newspaper. It is an insightful article about the hazards of railroad grade crossings from the account of an Illinois Central railroad engineer. The text has resounding advice and is overall currently still valid to many accidents today. The text was scanned and digitalized by Joshua Bauer. Additional credits follow the text.**

**I. C. ENGINEER MAKES APPEAL TO THE PUBLIC**

**Must assume share of responsibility on grade crossings.  
Foolhardy Drivers  
Responsibility for most of the accidents on grade crossings; must use care.**

Chicago, Ill., August 17, 1923 Editor, Kankakee Daily Republican – Kankakee, Illinois.

In wake\*\* of the campaign now under way to promote safety at railway and highway grade crossings all over the country, I as a locomotive engineer engaged in regular train service on the Illinois Central System, desire to make a personal appeal to the public thru the columns of your newspaper.

Accidents at crossings are apparently increasing in number every year. The greater majority of these are easily preventable. In most cases crossing accidents are due to lack of reasonable precautions by drivers of motor cars. No matter how watchful an engineer may be, it is beyond his power to avoid striking an automobile which speeds up on the track in front of a train running as trains must run in order to make their schedules. If the speed of all trains were reduced to fifteen or twenty miles an hour in the country it might be possible to stop them in time to prevent many fatalities. But transportation requirements of the country would be demoralized by such a procedure. Speed is an essential to prompt dispatch of passengers, mails, express and perishable commodities or products of field, factory and mine urgently needed. Delays of the transportation machine cause public losses that cannot be accurately calculated.

It therefore devolves on the public to assist in preventing accidents by exercising greater care at crossings. There are between 250,000 and 300,000 highway grade crossings on the railroads of the United States. Elimination of all of these cannot be sensibly considered in the present generation. It is estimated that average expense of such elimination if the problem were undertaken as a whole would be about $50,000 each, involving the expenditure of about twelve and a half billions of dollars. It would also occupy fifteen or twelve years’ time to complete the work. The remedy for accidents must be found in some other way. The public must assume its share of responsibility by taking care that the way is clear before attempting to cross a railway track.

More than 9,000 persons have been killed outright and more than 24,000 others injured in crossing accidents involving trains and automobiles during the past five years. It is not unreasonable to say that 90 per cent or more of these accidents were due to carelessness or downright recklessness on the part of drivers of cars. A little thought and precaution by the motorist would have saved all this loss of life, suffering, and destruction of valuable property. The potential danger which attends all these crossing horrors goes farther than the occupant or occupants of the motor car struck. There is an ever-present likelihood of train derailment and consequent frightful results of a disastrous railway wreck. A foolhardy driver may feel that he has a right to take his own life in his hands if he chooses. But has he the right to endanger the lives of others – the men who run the trains and the passengers therein?

The disposition on the part of the public to place all the responsibility …  
  
***MISSING PAGE 6 EXCERPT- SEE DISCLAIMER AT END OF TEXT.***  
  
… present transcontinental relay amiability on the railroads for safety at crossings is wrong in principle. The railroads are a public utility and a necessity. Their trains confined to a narrow line of track which lies where everyone can see it and avoid the disastrous effects of being struck by trains. Common sense ought to impel any intelligent person to be careful and avoid risks. It is very easy to take the course of safety. Only a minute’s time is necessary to make sure that the way is clear. The thing always to remember is that one must not take anything for granted. ALL RAILWAY CROSSINGS ARE DANGEROUS. The only dependable guaranty of safety is to “Stop, Look and Listen,” before driving on a railway track.

An engineer has no choice. He must drive his engine forward on time as far as he’s within his power and he cannot deviate from those two parallel lines of rails. He cannot at a moment’s notice bring that speeding projectile to a dead stop. Such a thing is physically impossible. When the foolish motor car driver stalls his machine on the track, or finds after trying to “beat” a fast train that he has been outpaced\*\* in the race, the engineer is powerless to avoid what happens. He would avoid it if he could.

It is no fight or trivial thtnpple\* wit\* in a rocking cab and see and feel your engine strike an automobile loaded with human beings. There can hardly be a grimmer moment in human experience than that. An engineer whom –it\* it is to go thru such a moment will never lose this picture from his memory. The man who takes a gambler’s chances with death at behind\* the wheel of an automobile ought to think of others besides himself.

I believe that there are too many young and irresponsible persons permitted to drive motor cars without restraint or supervision. Such persons have no clear idea of the deadly possibilities of power and speed combined. If they were possessed of calm judgment and discretion they would not take chances at crossings. No same person will accept a needless risk when he has nothing to gain and everything to lose. There is no glory in “beating” a fast train over a crossing where a miscalculation of a few seconds, or the slightest mischance means a horrible end. It is the act of a fool.

I appeal to all those who may read this communication to ally themselves with the cause of Prevention of Accidents at Railway Crossings. Let’s every one of us think Safety First, talk it, argue it, live it. Whenever anyone of us comes within view of a railway crossing, let the thought be upper most in our minds, “Stop – Look – Listen.” No precautions taken will be time or trouble wasted. Even to relieve a little of the nervous dread that lurks in every engineer’s breast is well worth a while. We engineers never know when we start out on our runs but what that day or night may be our turn to undergo the ordeal of Death at a crossing.  
 - Ve… -NAME REMOVED/TORN-   
 M. H. KEMPTON  
 6202 University Avenue

\* - This indicates text was completely unreadable from scan and was presented as best read with no synonym fitting. This is due either by a particle on the microfilm or a bad scan off the page by whomever cataloged the newspaper onto the microfilm.  
  
\*\* - This indicates text was unreadable from scan, so a fitting synonym was chosen based on context.

DISCLAIMER: This article was scanned on a compressed time schedule allowing for a large margin of error. Error, in fact, was a problem as I missed the section of the article presented on page 6 of the issue. I wish to apologize and offer my promise to make an additional trip to rescan this article to recover the missing portion and make it whole. Also, the rescan may help offer some insight on the indistinguishable text.  
Thank you all for reading. Special thanks to the Daily of Journal of Kankakee for allowing perseveration of the article, and to the Kankakee Public Library for allowing me to scan and freely access the article and many more historical newspapers.