

When I was a roughneck back in the day, the job was a bit more gritty than it is now. Goodness, I worked on some drilling rigs that didn't even have heat, and that is saying something when you are working in the Williston Basin in wintertime.

It was back in the 1970s when climatologists were predicting a new ice age. Do you want to know what the definition of cold is? It's when you're at the end of your eight-hour shift, starting to come out of a 12,000-foot hole down on the Little Missouri River in North Dakota. It's 11 p.m., minus 38°F (it will be minus 50° by sunup), the wind is blowing about 30 mph, you're up in the derrick 90 feet off the deck pulling pipe back, glancing over your shoulder for headlights that signal your relief has arrived, but no headlights ever appear.

You're pulling a double shift. Illuminated by the rig lights, ice particles are falling out of the air like snow. The only lights visible are the Northern Lights dancing in the distance. You have on two pair of insulated Carhartts, bunny boots, and a wool hat pulled down over your ears. Your eyes are continually watering in the cold air, and the runoff freezes on your cheeks. The minute you realize that your relief either twisted off or couldn't get in because of a whiteout is the coldest you will ever be in your life. You are cold and you are alone against the elements. Aaaahhh, the valiancy we imagined!

With respect to the job of drilling oil wells, we had a limited number of tools that made our job possible: an assortment of pliers, crescent wrenches, hammers, parmelee wrenches, screwdrivers, cable cutters, cheater pipes, drill pipe tongs, and the *pièce de résistance*, a 36-inch pipe wrench. We had what we needed, and if for some reason we didn't, we asked the tool pusher to get it. Things were simple; there was no anarchy, no cloud of anxiety over what tool we needed or where to get it. It was a narrow and clear pathway.

If we fast-forward to the present, frequently there are times when it is overwhelming to face an almost unlimited choice of tools. Here's an example. When I am forced to go to the store to buy toothpaste, I become hypnotized—no, paralyzed—by all the choices. It is staggering how many kinds of toothpastes there are. My eyes glaze over and my pulse quickens. It is so frustrating because I just want plain toothpaste.

The Internet has made many things

TALES FROM THE WASTELAND

The New Anarchy

An uncontrollable Internet.

By Barry Perryman, Ph.D.

overwhelming. Eric Schmidt, former CEO of Google, says, "The Internet is the first thing that humanity has built that humanity doesn't understand, the largest experiment in anarchy that we have ever had."

Quite honestly, some days it seems like total anarchy. I finally figured out why point-of-contact information on the Internet tends to lean toward complete and utter stupidity. If you put three people who do not know each other in a room, the conversation will

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always fall to the lowest common denominator. Now add a billion people to the room. How low does the common denominator have to go to be inclusive of a billion people?

You get the idea. The International Telecommunication Union estimated a billion users in 2012, so that common denominator has fallen even further since then. Not long ago I saw a front-page story on my home page that read: "The six most glorious faces Justin Timberlake made during his Country Music Awards duet." And yes, I clicked on it to see if it really was six photographs of him making faces as he performed. Sadly, it was true.

Another exhibition of anarchy is in the world of computer/smartphone applications, better known as apps. According to *Consumer Reports*, there are more than 3.1 million different apps you can choose from. There were only about 800 apps in Apple's App Store in 2008. As of June 2015, there were at least one-and-a-half million. At the end of 2013, Nielson reported that smartphone owners used 28 apps per month and spent over 30 hours using them. The millen-

nials led the way, using 28 apps and over 37 minutes of time per month. Even the 55-plus crowd used 22 apps per month and spent at least 21 minutes using them.

There are apps for every persuasion and use. If you can imagine it, there is an app for it. In Nevada we now have useful apps for brand inspections and rangeland grazing monitoring. I can only guess how many other agricultural apps there are. If you need a ride, there are apps that summon a car. There are apps for checking your kid's math homework. There is an app that tells you the business hours of any particular business; that's all it does. There is another that will tell you if there is room for your party at any particular restaurant. There is even an app that allows you to scan the barcodes of food items with your phone, and instantly give you the nutritional information. I suppose that one is good for people who would rather read it off their phone screens instead of off the label of the product they are holding in the other hand.

There's a personal safety app that watches over you because moving away from home can be scary. If you don't check in with the app at the scheduled time, it sends emergency information back to your phone so you can call the police, ambulance, or hearse. I'm still confused over that one. There is also an app that blocks the Internet so you won't be bothered by social media. I just use the exit button. I suppose these goofy kinds of apps will make somebody's life fuller.

There are also malicious apps. One story I read indicated that there are at least a million malicious apps out there available for download by the unwitting. And of course there are hidden or vault apps that look like calculators or other innocuous programs, but are used to hide photos and texts from your parents or significant others.

The great American Homer Simpson once said: "The Internet? Is that thing still around?" At the end of the day I'm not sure if it's made life easier or harder. I have trouble seeing through the anarchy. ■

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