

# MAILBOX MAYHEM

*By Mike Standish*

Back in 1982, when we purchased our summer home on Bay Shore Drive, I noticed that the previous owner, Andy, had a peculiar set up for their mailbox.

It was stacked upon what appeared to be a teepee of wood. It was quite a pile – about four feet across at the base. Andy said that every year he stacked more wood around his post and hammered in “a keg of nails” in preparation for the winter season.

Since I was from Chicago, a much more advanced civilization, I determined that a more permanent and sophisticated system was in order. I fashioned a system using a pipe within a pipe. The exterior pipe was the base and the interior pipe held out the mailbox and, when hit, swung away from the blow. The mailbox was attached to the swinging piece with three sturdy bolts.

I was sure this system represented true genius. I didn't know whether to patent it or spill my idea to Bob Vila on *This Old House*. The family celebrated by painting Trilliums on the outside and a message, “Hello Mr. Mailman” on the inside of the lid.

All of this joy came to an end last winter. The first snow (about four inches and one so light you could blow the snow off your car) resulted in tragedy. The morning after it snowed I walked down the driveway and saw with dismay that my mailbox was about ten feet from its perch. A closer inspection showed that all three bolts had been snapped in the decapitation. It was the victim of the Door County snowplow. Apparently, it was not a situation unseen before by our mail-person. Tied to the pipe was a food store plastic bag with our regular delivery of 25 catalogs and two bills.

Later in the winter, my wife and I took a little walk. It's about a mile from our driveway to the Carlsville Road. On the way back we counted. There are 31 mailboxes along this mile and 23 of them were permanently disabled. These injuries

ranged from the simple knockdown to virtual atomic explosions. Extrapolating this sample to the 150 members of BSPOA, it seems that over 100 would not be getting their property tax bills except by carrier pigeon. The snowplow was taking no prisoners.

I closed my eyes and imagined if I had the responsibility of saving Door County from the crazed snow plow operators...

I would get to the bottom of the carnage. Going to our institute of higher learning, Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, I demanded service for the \$25,000 in taxes they had siphoned from me over the last ten years. Introduced to the head of the Nuclear Physics department, Professor I. M. Incorrigible, I laid out the facts

of the case. The Professor calculated the weight of the snowplow, gage of the bolts and amount of brandy consumed by the average driver over the typical shift. Fingers flying over the abacus for several minutes, he stopped and looked up. “That snowplow driver had to be going between 97 and 109 miles per hour,” he said with some authority. That seemed to jive with my independent visual observations.

My next meeting was with the Postmaster in Sturgeon Bay. He reluctantly agreed to meet with me, but insisted on wearing a Lone Ranger mask to disguise himself. When asked about the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of mailboxes destroyed during the winter, he offered little help. “What mailboxes?” he said shaking visibly. “We never get any reports of mailboxes. You know, I have a wife and family that I love very much. I don't want any trouble. Maybe I could offer you a discount on a Post Office Box. Goodbye.” Next stop, the driver's shed.

I cornered our local driver, Gwen Malfusion, who was off shift and chortling with other driv-



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ers. When I confronted Malfusion with the facts – the speeding, the destruction, the heartache – his face contorted into a mask of ridicule and contempt.

“Look pretty boy,” he said, “you better get with the program. We’ve got a lot of men whose livelihood depends on driving and we won’t let you or any of the other tea drinkers and interior decorators on Bay Shore Drive get in our way.” He pushed his burly face within an inch of my nose (violating my space) and continued.

“It’s not easy to make a living up here. We can’t live on the snow plowing salary. So we have a deal with the local hardware stores. We destroy mailboxes. Every new one they sell from November to April gets us a finder’s fee. Then, and this is the beauty of it, we double dip with a bonus from the SRBofA.” Malfusion explained that the SRBofA stood for Snowplow Replacement Blades of America, an association that pushes for the early replacement of snowplow blades. They’ve found out,” he said “that for every 100 mailboxes we take down, it takes three years off the life of the snowplow blade. And when you throw in the ones embedded in concrete, it’s just off the charts. This is where the big money is.

“You know, we’ve struggled. Very little snow. Our families couldn’t even afford the new plasma television sets. A couple of guys went crazy. On an August night they took out the plows and started taking out boxes. It was a disaster. The Sheriff got involved. The Postmaster started screaming about the destruction of mailboxes being a federal crime. They were going to prosecute. We had to act fast. We got some baseball bats, doctored them up, and planted them in a garage. Then we tipped the cops about the high school kids who did the vandalizing. After a little interrogation by the coppers, four of them were sent up the river.”

Horried, I asked how he could live with himself – sending innocent high school students to prison. Rocking back away from my face, he pressed his hands together as if in prayer. Looking directly over his hands and into my eyes he said, “Sometimes you must destroy the village to

save the village. It was for the greater good.”

Continuing in his philosophical mood he said, “You know even under the best of circumstances, it’s hard. Without snow we can’t knock over any boxes. With a lot of snow, like last winter, it’s still a challenge. You know, I won’t say our drivers have NASCAR credentials or anything, but think about it. We’re averaging sixty to eighty miles per hour on icy back roads. The boxes are back farther and farther. The high speed swerving to hit them requires nerves of steel. We go right to the brink.” He became misty eyed. “And sometimes we don’t come back.”

Unnerved by this meeting, I drove slowly home. They were too big to fight, but I would do what I could. I retrieved some one-inch thick bolts and vowed to protect my box at all costs. I refastened everything down and waited.

I started to revive from my fantasy...

As winter wore on the snow continued. During snowstorms I would hear the roar of the snowplows following by the clanging sound of metal battering metal. Each day I would visit my mailbox. While taking a severe beating along its north side, the new bolts and movable pipe were winning the battle against total destruction.

Winter finally started unlocking its grip. The huge mounds of snow started to shrink. In mid March I noticed something peeking above the mound. Twelve feet from the mailbox, I picked it up. It was a bundle of mail from late January – twenty-five catalogs and two bills. Gwen Malfusion couldn’t destroy the box, but he put the mail in orbit.

**Author’s Note:** The Highway Department will consider replacement of your mailbox if (1) it is installed properly and (2) it is hit by a snowplow (not the sprayed snow or ice). Proper installation is a post at least 18’ from the road centerline, with the box no closer than 16’ from the centerline. Height is a minimum of 43” above the edge of the road shoulder. Call John Kolodziej, Highway Commissioner of Door County, at (920) 746-2500 to lodge a formal complaint. Last winter in all of Door County, there were approximately 15-20 complaints with the Highway Committee granting compensation to only 4-5.