

THE CROSSING Chapter 9

A sampling of dozens of letters
to the Weld County
District Attorney's Office

9100 San Gabriel Rd.
Atascadero, Calif.
Dec. 29 - 1961.

District Attorney's office -
Greeley, Colorado -

Dear Sir -

Will you please read the
enclosed newspaper clipping.
We do not know the writer,
Paul Jones - but our hearts
have ached for the tragic
loss of the school children -
- We had no Christmas tree
etc - this year - We were not
alone in that - It must be
agony, also, for the bus-
driver - One performs
duties automatically, as we
all know - he easily may
have - he must have known
also no train was due at
that hour. We do not presume
to advise in your responsible
position - We only pray God to
guide you. Most sincerely,
Mr. and Mrs. R. W. Graybill

them in, no one is to blame
that sanction such business
feel to sorry for them and I feel they
just sign their little children's death
warrants when they use no judgment
whatever when they must have ^{Consolid-}
ation. It's one of the worst curses that
came upon the country and sometimes
I wonder if

Very truly
isn't also a
punishment, ^{Lula R. Evans}
we can make all
Rt B- Box 130 Sidney, ^{Nebr.}

kinds of excuses for these things when they
happen but you know & I know the ^{Country}
schools are still the place for children
in the grades. This Mr. Harms who all
that know him speaks kindly of for doing
a job and will be a cross on his life
as long as he lives.

Sidney, Nebr., Dec 11/16/62

Jan. 9, 1962

Assistant District Attorney, Karl R. Ahlborn
Dodge, Colo.

I too want to add my bit on that
School Bus - Train disaster due to the
publicity in the papers - on who to place
the blame - and if all are fair they'll
put right in the faces of those who ^{were}
so desperate & determined to destroy the
Country schools where children as young
as that load was should be going and
fought & voted for that Consolidation.
Those tragedies have happened before ^{and}
will keep on happening when they just
must have these ? Schools. I've never
found one thing good in their favor
and everything against them ^{when}
parents and what have you scheme
and connive every possible way to get

7th July
Dunlop & Harrow
(211816)

Dear Sir,

If I hadn't moved Sunday
I would have had 3 on that
gateful school bus & possible
lost all but my son, 12
years old said it isn't
any wonder that Susan
Harms hit the train. He
said these children did
just about every thing on
that bus just screaming
fighting, jumping across
+ chased + over seats & really
raised Cain & that Mr. J
Harrow had to keep his eye
on rear view mirror most
of the time to keep them
from really tearing up each
other & the bus & he said
in the week he rode on
the bus that Mr. Harmawitz
stopped at stop sign &
rail road crossing. & I know
the school had up most
confidence in him for when
I took my children to Delta
the teacher told me he was
a fine man & a good driver.
My son will testify for him

if needed for there doesn't
 have to be a court of law
 to punish him - He has
 to live with his self that's
 enough.

Thank you

Norma Collins Bales
 8th - 31st Hwy.
 Greeley, Colo.

Chicago, Ill.
April 11th 1962

Dear Sir,

I am compelled to write this letter to you and I have been very anxious to do so, but on account of being so occupied with so many things on my mind I could not manage to obtain the time. But I finally did manage to do so now.

It is in reference to the terrible tragedy that the clipping from the Chicago Tribune I have enclosed states in regards to the accident. I certainly was shocked

especially when so many
people possessed so much
sympathy for the Bus
driver; and especially
to realize he stated he
did not feel bad physically
after the accident.
Those people must be
cluckers hearted or cold
blooded especially to state
the damage was done and
all that could be done was
to buy the food.
I am very satisfied to know
I do not have them kind
of neighbors to live near.
They must have an awful
mind when they can be
satisfied to issue such a
terrible statement.

especially to realize so many
dear children were killed
in such a terrible tragedy.
I believe that Bos lives
should be sentenced to
life in prison.

You can have this
printed in the newspaper
if you wish so the people
who were so cold blooded
will realize the majority
of people in Chicago do
not approve of the same
thoughts as they do,
will you please write and
state all the particulars
in reference to this case.

And oblige
John P. Barry
544 S. Union St.
Chicago 9 Ill.

Asst Dist Atty Karl Ahlbum ^{Recd} 12/18/61

Since we heard about that terrible
School bus accident and cant find any
other address I'll send my Sympathy card
to you in hope that at least some may
read it, it seems so terrible, if the
towns would leave the children in these
Country School things like ~~to~~ that
would happen, I feel sorry for the
Parents and that those children had to
die in that way

may the lord of all comfort
of comfort all these loved ones
is our prayer

Mr. & Mrs. H. P. Ediger
Meade, Kansas

Fleming, Colo
Jan 3 1962

District Attorney

Dear Sir:

I am a small contractor in and around Fleming Colorado and I would like to take this opportunity to tell you my opinion of Duane Harms.

Being a small contractor I do not have year round work for my men so I usually hire boys just out of school or in their senior year. For two years I had the privilege of hiring Duane and I can tell you very honestly he was one of the few boys I have hired that I allowed to drive my pickup and car. It was always with the greatest confidence I had him handle all the equipment, and in my opinion Duane is the most concienious, honest, reliable boy of his age I have ever known, my own sons included.

I strongly feel that if a tornado had caught that bus and ripped it apart, it would not have been any more an act of God than what happened. If Duane had been a little more careless on that particular morning, and had not stopped, he could very likely gotten across before the train got there so how can anyone think there is any blame?

In my opinion this fine young man deserves better treatment than he has had. I am sure you will be kind as well as just.

As Ever

Morris Pyle
Fleming
Colorado.

People v. Harms
Spokane Washington
Dec 15-1961

Asst Dist Attorney
Greeley Colorado-

recd 12/18/61

Could anything be more tragic than a needless accident! Which now overshadows all else in your community! There are no ifs in this instance for it was the drivers obligation, to safety, to be sure the train was not due at that moment. No excuse is plausible on the bus drivers bad judgment to ever try to beat an on coming train. In this instance, causing suffering and such a terrible needless snuffing out the lives of these precious children - and bringing sorrow to the parents - for no reason - I think the driver of the bus should be made an example for needless man slaughter - I don't see how he can live with himself knowing he was to blame as a reckless piece of humanity - It will surely cast a sorrowful shadow over our fair north - West!

I am enclosing a four page Review account of your accident -

People v. Harms

12/18/61

The Rosslyn

THE LARGEST POPULAR PRICED HOTEL IN THE WEST

111 WEST FIFTH STREET
LOS ANGELES 13, CALIFORNIA

Dec. 16, 1961.

Mr. Karl Ahlborn,
Asst. Dist. Attorney,
Breeley, Calverton

Dear Sir:

In regards to the fatal
Bus crash, it would be only fair
to hold the Railroad equally
responsible - This train was
going $1\frac{1}{3}$ miles a minute and he
was on top of the Bus driver -
before he could see him.

There is a flag stop at
Breeley for this train going
West; then north and a
scheduled stop eastbound -

Because he was only
an hour late, he wanted to make
up some of lost time.

I never heard of any crash
by any train that the carrier
was held responsible or do
its about time the people
wake up.





The Rosslyn

• THE LARGEST POPULAR PRICED HOTEL IN THE WEST •

111 WEST FIFTH STREET
LOS ANGELES 13, CALIFORNIA

The crossing signals are inadequate at Breeley and something should be done at once to correct this hazard -

Today, the American Railroads are classed as untouchables and in conclusion - The Big fish eats the small ones.

+ Oblige.

Respectfully.

Eddie S. Zarecki.



Rec'd
12/19/61

R.D. Woody
Turlock Calif
8th South ave

Dear Sir

I am writing in regard to the Bus driver who had the accident with the train, I drove Bus for 3 years the lord was with me and I had good luck. I have children & home & of my own, But 2 months after I quite driving Bus, I run a stop sign ^{in my own}, a car hit me, I killed the other driver two children, it like a little hell to live with something like that when a man is at fault, so have the people of these children to put their self in that driver place. and see how they would feel, if a person hasn't suffered any thing like this

They dont know what
it is. I dont say that
the matter should be dropped
but give him a fair chance
The Bible says the Lord
giveth & the Lord taketh,
how the people to pray
for him, who knowe
they might have an
accident, I would be
pleas'd to have you put
this in the paper, in your
own words, Im not much at
writing letters but I do know
God & our I know any man
with a sound mind wouldnt
pull a foolish trick like
that on yourself,
for give me if im intruding
Truly Yours R.D. Woody

Denver, Colorado, 12/17/61

Asst. Dist. Atty Karl Alborn,
Weld County,
Greeley, Colorado.

Dear Sir: I wonder why it is that the railroads are always right when they kill people at railroad crossings and the drivers in automobiles and trucks are always to blame. The railroads can go on killing people all over the country and God knows they have killed their share here in Colorado and they are never to blame and dead men cant defend themselves. You have filed involuntary manslaughter charges against the driver of the fatal bus accident Duane Hermes because he was and is in such shock that he cant remember things. It is too bad you werent in his place so you could know a little about the terrible shock he has and is undergoing. As for railroad men they are hardened to all their experiences of killing, the conductor of this train has already killed another person at a crossing in Colorado and never held responsible and still he is let operate trains. He is too old to be running a fast train like he was running when he smashed into this school bus but all these railroad men are brazen and are past masters on putting on a front even if they know they are in the wrong and it goes on year in and year out and they continue to kill and lie. How are you to know that that train was only running 79 miles an hour? Just because that conductor said he was going 79 miles an hour is no proof that he wasnt running 100 miles an hour, he was late and he was making up time. I think you had better do a little studying of the killings that the railroads have done in Colorado and as I have said above just remember that dead men cant defend themselves and are at the mercy of the hardened railroaders who are always ready with their side of the accident whether it is true or not.

An observer and resident of Colorado

December 19, 1961

Mr. Karl R. Ahlborn
Assistant Dist. Attorney
Greeley, Colorado

*Revised
12/22/61*

Dear Mr. Ahlborn,

I have just read in our paper the news articles and the well written article on the editorial page of the Greeley School bus tragedy. I also read and heard via the radio that manslaughter charges are to be brought against the young bus driver Duane Harms by you. This action on the part of your office seems to be completely unjustifiable at this time. It is understandable, considering human nature, to grope for someone to blame for this terrible accident. Feelings are no doubt running high in the Greeley area. The emotions of grief, sympathy, and even anger are probably in over abundance. The heartfelt sympathy of the people of San Luis Obispo as well as other people in other areas I am sure reaches out to the people of the Greeley area, but these feelings of emotions in my opinion do not call for manslaughter charges to be placed against the young bus driver, who upon being questioned while in a state of extreme shock, stated that he was not sure whether he stopped at the crossing or not. He said however that he thought he did because he said he always had. We all know that when we do things as a matter of routine it becomes a habit and an act is performed without actually thinking about it at the time. How many times have we all after having gone to bed at night, wondered if we have turned off the furnace, locked the door, put the cat out, or any number of things of which we have formed a habit. Statistics prove that you have done these things without thinking about it because of the habit you have formed. We could not definitely swear even without being in shock that these acts have been done.

Also according to radio reports, a sixteen year old boy who was riding next to the driver stated that the driver stopped the bus and opened the door. However, with the people clamoring for someone to punish for this accident it is doubtful that this boy will stick to his version even if he knows definitely that it is true. If the driver had died would that have lessened the grief. Now if your office feels that an indictment for manslaughter must be instituted at this time, because of public pressure or other reasons, which as stated above are premature, but if it has to be done, the indictment for manslaughter would seem better suited against the railroad company who was endeavoring to make up a two hour delay in their schedule at 81 miles per hour, perhaps even faster, but for the sake of a point let us take their figure of 81 miles per hour or 1.199 miles a minute, 105.333 feet per second. In 50 seconds the train traveled 5266.50 feet a fraction under one mile. Does the railroad company have the right to streak their trains across country without regard to life or property of the people?

Let us consider the railroad crossings and school buses. Most all crossings are built up on a road bed so that it is necessary for any vehicle crossing the track to proceed up an incline. Having ridden a school bus for four years to high school, I believe I have a fair knowledge of the operation of buses, problems of the bus driver, and etc. The bus in this accident was a sixty passenger bus. Let us say that the driver did stop at the crossing, opened the door, looked, closed the door,

pulles the bus into low gear, released the brake and proceeded to pull across the track. While he is doing this, the train at 81 miles per hour traveled a fraction under a mile in 50 seconds. I doubt that the driver after coming to a stop could have driven the bus across the track in 50 seconds. The bus driver has conduct problems on a bus, mechanical conditions of the bus are not always good, people will not always provide enough money for the school district, and federal aid to education is needed. A sixty passenger elementary bus needs a supervision for the children as well as driver.

The purpose of this letter is this, we seem greatly concerned about justice in Katonga or other places throughout the world and many times because of emotions and etc. we overlook or turn our backs on justice in our own country, state, or community.

Lets speak out for understanding and justice at home.

Sincerely,

Paul Jones
527 Marsh Street
San Luis Obispo,
California

First Methodist Church

TRAVIS L. DARBY, PASTOR
 STILWELL BLVD. AND LAKESHORE DR.
 PORT ARTHUR, TEXAS

December 20, 1961

Copy

Rec'd 12/24/61

Mayor Gordon Hissler
 Greeley, Colorado

Dear Brother Hissler:

The people of this city of 100,000 have read a great deal about the terrible tragedy of the 20 some-odd children losing their lives in the bus, train wreck last week. I wish to express my deep sympathy to the loved ones and the many friends of those who have had to say goodbye for a little while to those who were dear to their hearts.

My family and I know how to sympathize with these parents who lost their children in this tragedy, as we lost a son in a car wreck only a little while ago. He had already received the call to become a minister, of which we were very grateful, but our hopes, plans and dreams faded instantly. Even though darkness has clouded the way for many of the great people of your city and vicinity, it is my prayer that everyone shall continue to look to the Father and realize that we have not, and shall never, taste of anything that his son, Jesus Christ, hasn't experienced before us. We only press forward to the prize, which is ahead, and remember that God gave these promises, "And there shall be no night and they need no candle, neither the light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light and they shall reign forever and ever." Revelations 22:5. Therefore, we join hands with your bereaved people and continue to pray with confidence, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Psalms 23:1.

I wish to express my deep concern and sympathy to the bus driver, Duane Harms. I agree with Mr. and Mrs. John L. Roberts, that he should have all the love lavished upon him because of this unfortunate experience. It caused my heart to ache when I read the words of this young man who has a wife and one child; "I feel terrible, I don't know how to say how terrible." I know that in order for us to maintain this Democracy of America that we all hold dear to our hearts, that we must practice this scripture, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Love thy neighbor as thyself."

I am not privileged to have a relative or an acquaintance in your town or vicinity. I only felt the urge to write this

page 2

letter to you, so you may convey the wishes and the devoted prayers of a Methodist Minister down in Texas, and pray all charges, ill will, and injustice shall be withdrawn from this young man, Mr. Duane Harms.

With every good wish and God's tenderest blessings to you and yours, I am,

Sincerely,



Travis L. Darby

TLD/gsp

cc: Mr. Carl Ahlborn, Assistant District Attorney; Mr. Donald A. Carpenter, District Judge; Mr. and Mrs. John L. Roberts, Mr. Duane Harms and family.

Denver, Colorado,
March 21, 1962.

Mr. Karl Ahlborn,
Asst. Dist. Attorney,
Greeley, Colorado.

My dear Sir:

It is with heartfelt sympathy for all of you in the trial of the bus tragedy that I am writing this letter. I also wrote one to our Senator John Carroll.

I am not pleading for Duane Harms. He doesn't need it, for I know exactly how such an accident can happen. Not too long ago, in good weather, our auto nearly met the same fate by one of those speeding monsters. True the train can't leave the track, but even with the greatest caution, this type of accident can easily happen. We had approached the crossing, my husband had stopped the car and our friend got out, walked forward, looked carefully (it was a straight track) then climbed back in the car and said, "O - K - let's go." The door hadn't shut tight, so my husband didn't step on it right at that minute. And - My God - the next thing we knew the car swayed and this speeding demon almost sucked us under it's wheels. We hadn't missed death by a hair's breadth. The whistles on these Diesels at certain distances hit a wave length that merges with other sounds and you would never take it for a train whistle. WE've noticed that so much. Another thing, the speed of the train is hard for the human eye to comprehend. And I doubt whether the engineer traveling at such tremendous rate could positively state what the driver of the bus did. I question that.

I know how the train crew must feel. I personally know Herbert Summers, having gone to school with him. I also have relatives whose children go to that school. After our harrowing experience with a speeding Diesel, which left me shaking, I can assure you I could never sit on a jury and point

an accusing finger at some one involved in just such an accident as this.

As I told Senator Carroll, this young man must not be held to blame. He is only human. Man has created more than the mind at times can grope with and for the sake of saving a few dollars tragedies like this occur. WE, the people, the school board and public officials are guilty, and include the railroad, especially when running so far behind schedule.

May God help Duane Harms and these sorrowing ones to become the crusaders in demanding signals at bus crossings and a warning whistle from trains as penetrating and distinctive as the old locomotives were.

Also, no individual must have a two man job. Driving is responsibility enough without supervising children at the same time. And forbid that the time ever comes when a Diesel pulls out with only one man at the controls.

HOW DO I KNOW?

My daughter is a teacher and helps to load a bus every night. Duane deserves all the understanding and love you and every one involved in this hearing can give him. With God's help these darlings haven't died in vain, but a great reform can be brought about.

SAFE CROSSINGS AND A DRIVER WHOSE ONLY JOB IS TO DRIVE.

Sincerely,

Long Glass Phillips

Mrs. John Phillips
2721 - W - 25th Ave.,
Denver, 11, Colorado.

Denver, Colorado,
March 31, 1962.

Mr. Duane Harms,
Greeley, Colorado.

Copy

Dear Duane:

Enclosed you'll find a letter I have written Mr. Ahlborn. Is with deep understanding I am taking this privilege of writing these letters. This experience of ours never left a shadow of a doubt how just such unavoidable accidents can happen.

Stand firm and stand blameless. You are only human. Man has created more than the mind at times can grope with. Always know that out of every great sorrow some blessing grows. And feel also you have been an instrument to bring about a great reform we have so badly needed. Out of Christ's sufferings came our hope.

And when things settle down and you see these needed changes made, know you and your loved ones have walked thru Gethsemane, but have not walked thru this garden in vain.

My prayers are with you. Now grow stronger there is so much for you to do. There was no way you could change what happened.

If you don't believe this - follow our Master's Life. Jesus had that road to walk, even though he prayed the cup be taken from Him.

And you had to take the road ahead for you. Feel this Divine Presence and His words "LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS."

Love to you and your family.

Joy Phillips

Mrs. John Phillips
2721 - W - 25th Ave.
Denver, 11, Colo.