

Compiled by Helen McAvoy

### *The Night of the Melrose Train Explosion*

When my husband Kevin's beeper sounded that night, indicating a train on fire at the Melrose crossing, I mumbled "be careful" and rolled back over and went to sleep. He often was called out in the middle of the night as he was a member of the Township Fire Department. I have gotten so I don't wake up as I used to and so I assumed when I heard the pounding at the door that he had returned. It took me a minute to realize that the rapid pounding was more than a husband who had locked himself out.

When I opened the door the expression on the female police officer's face spoke more to me than the words themselves. "There has been a train crash and there is potential of an explosion-you must leave your home immediately." I asked where the Firefighters were and she said they were back at the site at a safe distance from the wreck. At almost the exact time, the air stilled and a large whoosh was followed by an even bigger explosion. The house filled with an eerie glow. Pictures had fallen of the walls of the back of the house and by the time I reached a window to the north a large fire ball was rolling into the sky.

I did not have to wake my children. The explosion did that. I told them as calmly as I could to get dressed and into the car. As the kids worried about the pets I said that anything that was in the car when I got there could come. Our dog, a cocker spaniel, led the pack to the garage. I am sure she knew there was something wrong.

Sometime during this time Kevin called from the Melrose station to warn me; hurriedly I told him we were leaving.

We raced in the car away from our house, up Wyman's hill toward Old Number Two. I think there may have been another explosion at this time. My children were frightened and worried about their Dad.

We reached the Tyendinaga School where friends and neighbors were being sheltered until the emergency was over. Kevin and several other Firefighters came to check on the group and fill in the community that lived near the wreck. It was apparent at this time that the potential for more serious explosions resulting in poisonous gases was present. I packed up the kids and head further away to Napanee to stay at my Mother's.

We were contacted by CP that we could all stay at the Ramada Inn Belleville. The option of a water slide was all my kids needed. We bought bathing suits, and some other necessities-(we couldn't return to our home)-and spent the weekend vacationing.

On Sunday we returned home. The smell of brunt lentils hung in the air. A "controlled" explosion was set for the next day for the last propane tank. I was relieved when that was over.

The experience has changed the way I view trains and safety. We see trains everyday. I cross 3 sets of tracks every day on my way to work. The potential for serious accidents like this one is always present. One must hope that the legislations put in place are adequately protecting us all, and when an accident like this happens it becomes a "wake up" call for the public and those that are protecting us.

Robin Thompson-McAvoy