"LOOKS LIKE A 'MURPHY'S LAW' NIGHT"

Bruce Boyea

(1) I've always been a firm believer in keeping a car in top running condition, just as long as I'm not the one responsible for doing it. My idea of getting a car tuned up is trying to find a radio station with no static. When someone mentions a car's fanbelt, I immediately think of air conditioning. So it should be no wonder that I experienced my own "Murphy's Law" night when a tire on my car went flat.

(2) I had been working at She-Nannigan's late that night; it was after three when I left the building. The bar had been closed for some time and the pedestrian traffic was light. I waited for a few cars to pass, then crossed the street to where my ancient car was parked. As I approached the battered sedan, I noticed that the rear tire on the driver's side was flat. I stood before the car, not believing that this could happen to me. I closed my eyes. Then, with a quick prayer, opened them, hoping for a miracle. The scream that blurted from my mouth and down the street, due to the kick my car had just received, told any passers-by that there had been no divine intervention.

(3) I thought for a moment, experiencing a deep feeling of betrayal and disbelief. Suddenly I remembered the lesson my father had given me the previous month: "Son, this is how you change a tire." The words ran through my empty head. All I could remember was how I had ignored his speech by drawing stick people in the sand of our driveway.

(4) "Think," I said aloud. What was it he had said? What was the first thing I was to do? Loosen the round things or pump the car up with the clicketty thing? It was no use; my head was hollow.

(5) After thirty minutes of arranging the tools in a fashionable design, I set out to conquer the round, rubber, treaded object bolted to the bottom of my car, the thing that had had the audacity to break wind, thereby leaving me flat. The first thing to do was to remove the hubcap; at least I'd had some experience at that. I grabbed the upper half of the trapezoid I had made with the tools. It was the crowbar. I remembered its name because it looked nothing like a crow. Pop! Off came the cap. My ego instantly surged with a sense of accomplishment. The rest would be a breeze.

(6) An hour later—with my shirt torn, my hands plastered with a mixture of grease and dirt and my ego fading fast—I finally managed to get the clicketty thing up under the bumper of the car. Also, the tire, which had once been firmly fastened to the car, now lay at its side. I knew that if the tire had been alive, it would have strangled me by now. But I was determined to beat it. I
would battle the black, demon-possessed circle to its death.

(7) I removed the devil's adversary from the trunk. By the white stripe around its body, I knew this one was not possessed like the first. I placed my savior on the bolts of the rear axle. Now all I had to do was to reverse the process I had just perfected. I was sure I had won!

(8) I tossed the beaten rubber object, which had succeeded in turning my once new Calvins and Lacoste into rags unsuitable for the hind pocket of a mechanic's overalls, into the trunk of the car and slammed it shut. I returned to the scene of the accident I was perfecting.

(9) As the sun rose at the end of the asphalt strip, I tightened the last nut onto the wheel and snapped the hubcap back on. I had won the battle! The life that had been lost was not mine.

(10) I stood to dig into my pocket for my keys. What? Where were my keys? Panic raced through me. "No," I thought. "This can't be happening to me!" I cried down the street. I had locked my keys in the trunk along with the deflated tire.

(11) I dropped to the curb. The tears from my eyes and the pain from my back told the story. I had won the battle, but the tire had won the war. Yes, it had certainly been a "Murphy's Law" night.