



Life and then the End

"The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated."

Attributed to Mark Twain in 1897

In fact Mark Twain or Samuel Clemens would live for more than a decade after he was credited with the above statement. Today, we are once again hearing similar claims of demise not of a personal nature, but rather of the end of the Western Canadian Sedimentary Basin (WCSB). As I look back over the past three decades this is not the first time this dire warning has been uttered. Certainly the National Energy Program, when it was introduced in 1980, coincided with a decided downturn in WCSB activity. Regardless of the connectivity, it had electoral consequences that still resonate to this day for the political party that authored the bill. Once again in 1986 due to declining commodity prices the WCSB was on life support. Over the past twenty years we have seen both expanding and contracting marketplaces. As an industry we have survived, after every downturn those involved acquiring new skills.

It was at the 2006 Annual Convention that I was told by a student that the new batch of graduates would never see any staff reductions or an industry downturn. Fortunately, as I am conservative in nature I did not go out and remortgage my home. Yet it is as though we have just awoken from three years of prosperity to find the Heavyweight Boxing Champion hammering us from corner to corner. Each punch landed on the Producers has taken on a different appearance, such as the implications of the rising value of the Canadian dollar coinciding with slumping gas prices. Their current fear has the Alberta government loading up with what appears as an unfriendly new royalty structure on the horizon. Once again we may be forced to counterpunch, merely to survive the round.

As I look back to the mid-1970's when I first entered the exploration business, I note that neither my employer at the time, Seiscan Delta, nor my principal customer, Canadian Reserve, are still with us. I hasten to point out there exists no connectivity, as many of those who I didn't do work for are gone as well. It is as well reassuring that many of those individuals I worked with or for have survived, finding employment elsewhere. It would be false to suggest they all survived in our business as some have gone into other lines of work. Many have done extremely well as their talents were often better suited outside our ever changing industry.

As our October CSEG Luncheon speaker Peter Tertzakian suggested, once again we need to get more competitive. As I continue looking back to that same mid-1970's we see keypunch personnel, computer operators plotting seismic sections, and a thriving trade in the sale of coloured pencils. Well the first two are largely gone. I am however, still very proud of my coloured pencils although I am finding it increasingly difficult to find something to colour. Personal computers and workstations reduced the need for a lot of clerical support. We soon had access to new technologies for processing, interpreting and imaging. This technological growth has completely changed the face of our society. We still have the cutting edge of our Industry working in the field, at the seismic recording level, but an ever growing segment are building the visualization tools in order that we can all do more.

The Canadian exploration community is no longer concerned with just Rainbow Lake and Rumsey. We haven't abandoned them, but simply expanded our search. Many still feel that there is plenty of work left to be done at home. Additionally, frontier activity shows signs of increasing along with the numerous international projects that are emanating out of Canada. What this portends is jobs for Canadian geoscientists both locally and abroad for the foreseeable future. With the variety of exploration and development challenges confronting our work force it augurs well for exporting this expertise into many other parts of the globe.

As for our technical community, I believe it will survive long after my coloured pencils have nothing left to sharpen. Regardless of how those in the Industry or those governing it behave, it will survive. The entrepreneurial and scientific spirit will trigger yet another transformation that will allow our community to survive. As this occurs I will finally be forced to discard my 'liquid paper'. This will coincide with the news that someone is employing new field technology to improve the images recorded. It will open up a whole new trend in exploration and provide our environmental friends with something else to focus on. You see we wouldn't want everything to change.

In 1992 I was told that ours was a sunset industry. It may very well be. The only difference seems to be that unlike the British Empire, our sun is not yet ready to set. **R**

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What's Coming in Future Issues of the RECORDER...

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Coordinators</i>	<i>Issue</i>	<i>Paper Deadline</i>
Fracture characterization	Satinder	<i>Mar-08</i>	15-Jan-08
Advances in seismic processing techniques	Jason / Oliver / Muiyi	<i>Apr-08</i>	15-Feb-08
State of Education in Canada	Carmen / Jason / Mike / Penny / Roger	<i>May-08</i>	15-Mar-08
Exploration in the north of Canada	Jeff / Carmen / Jason / Roger	<i>Jun-08</i>	15-Apr-08