

THE PIONEER SPIRIT

A rogue agent hits the road

BY GARY MAJORS, SR.

After a 30-year career in broadcasting, a friend asked if I might be interested in a job in right of way. With absolutely no knowledge of land measurements, title or anything else germane to right of way, I decided to accept the job. The day before I was scheduled to start my new organization held a two-hour introductory class. Now I knew everything, right?

So I went to work in Kansas on a fiber optic project. After three days, the permit agent quit. I was now the most experienced person on the project, and as such, I was asked if I would take on permitting. Was there really a choice? The lessons came at me fast. That's what happens when you work with Burlington Railroad and need to know what a plan and profile is. I survived that first assignment with much help from my supervisor and all the others who I relied on to forgive my ignorance.

After a few other jobs as a permit agent, the bottom dropped out of right of way, and I went back to run a barter business for a company that was based in New Orleans. Hurricane Katrina came without warning, and the headquarters building was under water for two weeks. With no cash flow, I was forced to quickly evaluate my options. When my boss offered to buy me out of my equity position, I took him up on the offer. Within a week, I was a right of way agent again, working with the New Orleans Levee District procuring sites for fiber optic relay stations as a massive city rewiring was being done.



From there, I moved on to other fiber, pipeline and power line projects. When I found myself on a power line project in Springfield, Missouri, it didn't take long for me to realize how much money I was paying for accommodations to be near each project. After several years in the business, I had a stack of hotel and motel receipts and not much to show for it.

A Logical Choice

My pioneer spirit, which came out of nowhere, suddenly took over, and I decided to buy my first travel trailer. While I had never had one before, it seemed like such a logical choice at the time. How naïve of me!

Little did I know that a travel trailer has to get hooked up to water, sewer, electricity and cable (or satellite) to have anything remotely close to the comforts of home (or even at motel, for that matter). Those things might be easy once

I got my trailer on site. But my F-150 truck wouldn't pull the trailer, so I had to trade it for a bigger truck. Now, only \$35,000 later, I was ready to travel.

It didn't occur to me that I might need to rent space once I got to my final destination. The rate would be only about \$300 a month, but this didn't seem like a problem because I was getting a per diem. That should cover everything, right? Not quite. While I was no longer paying for a motel room, I was paying for rental space, satellite, Internet and stocking up the trailer. Did I mention that the trailer didn't come with salt or pepper... or dishes, towels or anything else? It did come with a microwave, stove, oven and a sink, so I could at least cook for myself. But I had to buy those dishes, towels, utensils and dish soap. Ok, so I'm acquiring an asset, not just piling up receipts. Did I mention how smart my pioneer spirit was feeling about this time?

Oh, the Delusions...

You learn how to make do in a trailer, and you convince yourself that you are saving so much money over renting. There are also other delusions that come over you as you go.

Needless to say, the RV section of Wal-Mart and I had become best friends. Before long, I had a sewer hose, a new water hose and all the connections. Just when I thought I was all set, I discovered that water systems deliver different pressures to their lines in different areas. So now I had to purchase a flow regulator valve. Next, I learned that in order to make the water taste palatable, I would need a special filter. And since I have a front kitchen set-up, I needed another sewer hose to deliver that water from the kitchen sink to the one sewer connection in the ground. Black water, gray water, kitchen water, and fresh water holding tanks...these are all terms with which I quickly became familiar. And I might point out that they don't all hook up to the same hose.

Cold weather was coming, so I learned that I had to skirt the trailer to keep the water from freezing. With ready-made skirting costing about \$3,000, I went to Harbor Freight and bought a tarp for \$100 and some other stuff to make my own skirting. The hardware, grommet kit, wire, s-hooks and associated paraphernalia was only about \$200. The treated lumber, screws and other small things from Lowe's was only another \$200. I was really saving money now!

I called some friends, and we had a planning session so we could make the skirting look professional. After some pizza and drinks, we had a plan that was workable. With only two days of free labor (except for food and drinks), we

had fully installed a silver skirt on my gold-striped trailer. How much more professional can you get?

The Man-Cave Gets Cold

The first freeze came, but because I didn't think it would freeze until it got much colder, I didn't use the heat tape on the water hose. Once again, my pioneer spirit was wrong. When the water froze, I had to get more heat tape and more little foam things to cover up the heat tape and more tape to hold them on. The cap over the connection and foam spray to cover the tanks were the final step. Once I got the water back on in the trailer, things seemed to be ok. But then it got really cold.

Who knew that your tanks could freeze with black water and gray water in them? Actually, it was where the connections drained that froze, which meant they couldn't be drained. It didn't take long to find out that, when not emptied regularly, those black and gray tanks can raise the stink level to new heights. More heat tape and insulation solved the problem temporarily, but the spray foam doesn't stick to the tanks. So I had to install an oil heater under the tanks. Once the freeze was contained, or at least stymied, my pioneer spirit soared as another problem is solved by the genius of the American male!

Soon it is down to 56 degrees in my man-cave. With a wind chill factor of minus nine, my comfy home on wheels is rocking along with the 40 mph wind gusts outside. I am bundled up in a hooded sweatshirt with two pairs of socks on. I have two oil heaters going inside, as well as the one under the trailer. I had to get a ceramic heater to blow into the space where the water heater is hidden. After three days of frozen water, my kitchen water had

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finally thawed. No hot water or cold water for three days makes the pioneer spirit begin to stink almost as bad as the black and gray water tanks. But I got 'er done, by golly.

My pioneer spirit thinks that I want to continue to live this way forever. No wife to ask me to take out the trash, no grandkids wanting to sit on PaPaw's lap during the ball games and no phone ringing with telemarketers hawking vacations to warm places. This is the life! Well, this is the pioneer life, anyway.

Now I sometimes think back to when I stayed in a warm motel with cable, internet and maid service. Now those were the good old days.



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A self-proclaimed adventurer, Gary's twelve years as a right of way agent led him through many terrains and wind-chilling climates. He holds a bachelor's degree from Mississippi

College. Now retired, he has plenty of free time for story-telling.