

Seeing things at a distance

By Tony Pearson

The story is thrilling. An airline pilot has both of his engines flame out, turning his plane into a glider. He then attempts a landing on a river, and is successful in saving the lives of his passengers and crew. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? That's the story of Capt. Chesley Sullenberger, and the 2009 "miracle on the Hudson." Last year, it became a major motion picture called *Sully*, starring Tom Hanks. Hands up if you've ever heard the name Abdul Rozaq. Didn't think so. Yet seven years before Sullenberger's feat, after both engines in his Boeing 737 flamed out in a torrential hailstorm, Capt. Rozaq landed his plane on a narrow river between two bridges, saving 59 of his 60 passengers. Arguably, his feat was ever greater than Sully's, because he also lost his Auxiliary Power Unit and had no instruments at all to use during the landing, nor any radio contact with air traffic control.

So why isn't he celebrated as well? Answer: because he was flying for Garuda, Indonesia's national airline, and the flight took place in Java. In other words, it was off Western radar (unless you're a fan of the Discovery Channel).

Point? Our vision is selective. We pay attention to what happens in North America and Western Europe. We pay far less attention to the rest of the world.

Example: terrorism. Attacks in London, and earlier, Paris, are given saturation coverage. Yet most recent terrorism deaths are in the Middle East and South Asia. Case in point: the town of Abu Humam in Syria. When residents fought back against ISIS attacks on civilians, ISIS swept into town and killed most of the men, including teenagers; more than 900 were murdered.

Also within the last three years: Nearly 300 people were killed by a bombing in a Baghdad mall while celebrating the end of Ramadan ---- too early, according to religious fundamentalists. Nearly 100 people, including 20 children, were killed at a Sufi shrine in Pakistan. About 150 died in a bombing of a mosque in Nigeria. In fact, on the same day as the car attack in London, suicide bombers in northern Nigeria killed many people at a refugee camp, and then set fire to it.

Terrorism is a threat - but much less to people in Western countries than to those in war-torn regions of the Third World. Nearly three-quarters of all deaths due to terrorist attacks took place in five countries, none of them in the North Atlantic region. Three are Middle Eastern (Iraq, Syria, Yemen), one is Asian (Afghanistan) and one is African (Nigeria).

However, selective vision can also make us lose perspective, failing to keep things in proportion ? like pouring major amounts of money into very minor problems.

Thus, the United States spends more than \$100 billion on anti-terrorism programs. But compared to the threat posed by refugee terrorists, the data suggest the typical American is six times more likely to die from a shark attack, 260 times more likely to be killed by lightning, and 407,000 times more likely to die in a car accident. While a [top-rated attorney](#) can help the victims' families gain legal compensation for car accidents, people still die from them daily. In fact, an American is more likely to die from a toddler playing with a gun, or even from strangulation by his own clothes, than from a terrorist attack.

Film directors know that a large number of people like to be scared ? hence the huge grosses for many horror films. We also like to imagine that we are under threat, and need protection.

However, we in the West, and especially in Canada, live very secure lives in terms of external threats. Most of the physical harm we suffer, we inflict on ourselves. (I love the T-shirt that says "Redneck's last words - Hold my beer and watch this!")

One of the things I like about Bancroft is that most people keep their perspective; their focus is on local issues of genuine importance ? water and sewer expenses, hydro rates ? and on local events, like minor hockey (and our recently crowned all-Ontario champs), figure skating (the annual club carnival is this weekend), and community events like the Dungannon mud-bog (raising money for the fire department), and Canada Day celebrations (Expedia's website just named Bancroft one of the best small towns in Canada to spend the national holiday).

The Sermon on the Mount (King James version) contains the admonition: "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." A modern translation puts it this way: "There is no need to add to today's troubles." In other words, we have lots to concern ourselves with; we don't need to invent worries that are essentially bogus. I was duly scared when I first saw *Jaws*, but it didn't make me give up swimming.