

## STEVEN'S UNFORESEEN INCIDENT

*By Fred Hobbs*

Steven is stubborn; there is no doubt about it. Steven is unaccountably and unfortunately stuck somewhere in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, unable or unwilling to dwell gracefully in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world. Steven has strong and often unreasonable opinions that he is unable to communicate in a nuanced way. When he makes up his mind nothing can sway Steven. And he is not shy about expressing his opinions or proclaiming the "absolute truth" as he perceives it.

Although born in the United States, Steven's attitudes and attendant actions often are drawn from the "old country" traditions and values of his father, a Japanese immigrant. His family was among those Japanese-Americans interned in camps during World War II, which made an indelible impression on him as a pre-teen.

All of these circumstances have contributed to a life difficult for him.

Steven's family owns and operates a successful mercantile business where he once worked until a bitter intra-family argument over control and management of the store resulted in his becoming "the odd man out." Whether his personal traits fueled that outcome or he was unfairly treated, or a combination of both, Steven was out of work. He got a job as an assistant to the owner of a delicatessen, but that, too, ended in a not-too-amicable separation. In his pre-retirement years, Steven worked as a handyman.

Changing societal attitudes and the advent of technological developments have severely challenged Steven. He steadfastly refuses to embrace the use of a computer, cable television or cell phone.

He has isolated himself from many neighbors and would-be friends who can't or won't endure his harsh and constantly expressed views of the world.

The interaction with his now adult children and their offspring is on a precipitously rocky point. He expresses the belief that his grandkids are not respectful enough; he fears their future is in grave doubt mostly due to their parents' permissive style. This conflict has created a wide breach between Steven and his son and daughter and a bewilderment and fear among his grandchildren.

Mitigating Steven's behavior through his many mishaps and missteps has been his calm, intelligent and devoted wife, Ruth. Then recently came a very sudden, tragic unforeseen incident in Steven's life. Ruth passed away unexpectedly of a rare unexplained combination of chemical imbalances in her body that ultimately resulted in a fatal stroke.

Steven has never learned to cook, never balanced a checkbook or made a house payment. He depended on his wife to generate an income in his periods of unemployment while she constantly was keeping "the peace" in the family.

Now, he is alone.

Like a soap opera, this story offers not an ending, but a provocative question.

Will Steven have an epiphany and change his ways or will he die penniless and estranged from family and friends?