



***A Boy,  
A Bike,  
and a Train***



*by Kenneth Alberding*

*In the early 1930's the newly-elected U.S. President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, established the Civilian Conservation Corps. (CCC). This government program provided work for the swelling roll of*

*young unemployed men as a result of the Great Depression. One such established camp of CCC men was located a few miles north of Medaryville, IN, at the intersection of State Highway 43 (now US 421) and the present county road of 600 North. The State Highway Garage and Service Center now occupies a portion of that site. A regular schedule of passenger and freight trains ran on the Monon railroad that traversed north and south, just east of the state highway. The passenger trains would stop daily at each small town along the tracks to accommodate travelers and deliver mail. Later the passenger trains were discontinued, and only the freight schedule continued. It was in this setting that the tantalizing tall tale of my train travel took place.*

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A sizable contingent of CCC men was being reassigned to a camp in California. The transfer was to be made by passenger steam train, with the men boarding the train on the main track just a few hundred yards east of the camp. Since the trip to California would require a few days travel, provisions had to be made to feed this gang of excited men. To accomplish this feat, a railroad kitchen car was spotted on the Clark Siding, just one-half mile south of the camp site. Here CCC cooks had made some advanced food preparations for their trip west. I learned of these plans from Randal Stevens, a section leader at the local camp S-67. (“Steve”, as our family affectionately called him, later married my older sister, Olive.) I was just a kid of 13 with a bicycle, so I rode the two miles down to the camp to satisfy my

boyish curiosity. I was welcomed aboard the kitchen car and given a private tour of the cooking and baking facilities. A far greater delight was the offer to sample the mountains of cookies. There on the center table was tray upon tray of cookies of various shapes. Cookies of different colors, cookies with sugar toppings-cookies, cookies, cookies! There within arms reach was an opportunity to fulfill a childhood dream without restraint.

While still munching on these culinary delicacies, I heard the approach of a locomotive and the screeching of the engine's whistle. Its mission was to move the kitchen car north to the boarding site, couple to the waiting Pullman cars, and transport the men west. Thinking this was the end of my gourmet snack, I prepared to make my exit when one of the cooks insisted that I ride with them. He quickly pulled my bike aboard as a sudden jerk told us the engineer had made contact with the kitchen car. With my adrenaline pumping, I anticipated my first train ride. Now, I was going to ride on one of those trains that I had so often watched whiz by our barnyard.

I never tired of watching those massive iron horses puff out black smoke or spew out hot steam as they rumbled and roared along the countryside with their cargo. A "night owl" freight train chugged along these ribbons of steel at 10 p.m., as regular as the setting sun. Though our home was several hundred yards west of the tracks, I could feel the house vibrate and hear the windows of my upstairs bedroom rattle as I awaited the nightly visit of the sandman. The shrill whistle of the freighter,

as it approached the nearby crossing, would often complement a childhood dream of adventure.

Now I was about to be a passenger on that grand spectacle that for years I had only observed. With a sudden forward lurch, the engine began taking up the slack in each car's massive steel coupling. I was actually a passenger on this hunk of rolling steel, and now, as it started creeping north, I began to see the familiar countryside from a different vantage point. Moments earlier my attention was focused upon the heaping trays of cookies, now I was captivated by the clickety-clack of the train wheels and the passing view as I stood in the open doorway of the kitchen car. It only took a few minutes to travel that one-half mile north to the boarding platform, and my memorable ride came to an end.

Soon the young CCC men were filing across the highway carrying their bags toward the waiting train. As they boarded the cars, I heard several turn and jokingly call out to their former section leader, Steve, "Goodbye slave driver." Shortly thereafter they began their long trip to California, and I raced back home with an exciting story. My mind exploded with the thrill of a train ride and a kitchen car full of free cookies--and I never even bought a ticket!