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Riding the Rails of Milwaukee Road

By Larry Lee Phillipson

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by: **Larry Lee Phillipson**

I walked to the top of the hill to start the water pump. I could see farmers in the surrounding countryside working in their fields. I had wanted to get an early start in the field but Pa was sore at me for not helping with the morning milking instead so he wouldn't go into town to buy gas for the tractor!

Now, for some reason, the water pump engine wouldn't start. I cranked and cranked, to no avail. "To hell with it," I said and walked down the other side of the hill. "Why fight it."

I walked to Whitehall and was standing by the railroad depot. I looked at the new leaves sprouting from the buds on the maple trees. The faint scent of spring flowers bursting from their buds mingled with fresh, growing grass tantalized the air. The warm May sun felt good on my cotton, plaid shirt.

With its dynamic throb, the diesel engine appeared down the tracks, and pulled up to the station. The train slowed almost to a stop. The porter tossed the mail bag to the station agent. The engineer opened the throttle and the engine roared with a burst of power and the boxcars began rolling by with increasing momentum. The wheels made fast clicking sounds on the steel tracks.

I waited for the train to gain enough speed so that the brakeman wouldn't order me off. I didn't want to miss my grip, I remembered someone had slipped as he tried to hook a train and he had fallen under it. I reached out and grabbed a rung of the steel ladder on the side of a boxcar. I strained to swing myself up off the ground and then climbed to the top and sat down on the narrow board catwalk. I turned my head and watched the town diminish behind in the distance. The train whizzed by trees and telegraph poles as the steel rails reflected the sunlight like long, silver threads streaming back into the horizon.

Around hills and through valleys the train rolled and then climbed a grade that led toward the Mississippi bluffs. The train turned a bend, and there I could see the majestic Mississippi River shimmering in the sunset.

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It was getting colder now, and I wished that I had brought a jacket. Thousands of mayflies, that looked like huge mosquitoes, swarmed over the tops of the boxcar and I jumped up and ran along the catwalks leaping from car to car until I found one that was lower than the others. Then I laid down flat on my stomach as the mayflies, like drifting snow, blew past me from the higher car in front. I was getting hungry, but nothing could be done about that at the time so I took off my belt and tied my wrist securely to the catwalk, and in a short time I had fallen asleep.

When I awakened, it was dark as the train was pulling into the Twin Cities. Off to either side as far as I could see were lights twinkling, and then with a deafening roar the train plunged into a tunnel. When the train had emerged on the other side, it began to slow down and then finally stop. The big diesel unhooked up ahead and left the train sitting still. I sat up and put my belt back on and then slowly climbed down the ladder onto the ground.

In the darkness my feet tripped on the steel tracks and I tried to find my way out of the stockyards. I began to walk faster as the rumbling sound of moving trains grew louder. Suddenly, I was blinded by the glare of powerful headlights on trains coming from both directions toward me. The tracks were so close together that for a moment I became confused, but I stepped aside just in time as the two trains thundered past on either side.

Soon another train rolled past where I was standing. I climbed aboard an open topped gondola car that was loaded with lumber. There was an empty space in the corner and I laid down. I listened to the rhythmic sound of the wheels clicking on the steel rails, and soon I was asleep.

I awoke at daybreak, and the train had stopped. Standing up, I peered over the side of the gondola car and saw a town up ahead. I crawled over the side, dropped to the ground, and began walking along beside the train up to the station. There was a sign on the station printed in big letters. I read the words, "WILLMAR, MINNESOTA", and then I sat down on a wooden bench on the station platform. A new adventure had begun.

I was raised in a small farm community, Coral City, near Whitehall, WI during the Great Depression. Music has always been the biggest part of my life. I am a songwriter and singer. Entertaining and making recordings was the focal point until I went to college in Rockford, IL and my English professor liked my stories. I had already been singing for 20 years and made numerous recordings in Nashville. Still, it was another 30 years before I took the time to write my autobiography. After I was inducted into the Rockabilly Hall of Fame I decided it was time to leave a written record of the experiences that pushed me toward my goal and the trials that hampered me combining to make me who I am. Visit my website

email:

Look Where You're Going ... And Keep An Eye On The Blind Spots!

By Edward B. Toupin

Riding the Rails of Milwaukee Road

I recently had the pleasure of motorcycle riding instruction from a friend, Tony, a professional racer. He was an outstanding instructor and provided some great experience-based insight into the more intricate details of motorcycle riding. But, the one thing that stuck in my mind was his comment of "always look where you're going." I had always assumed that this is what I did, but I found out that there is a big difference between "watching" and "looking" where you're going.

If you're watching where you're going, then you're not actually picking a path, but are instead passively allowing the bike to go wherever it wants to go. However, if you look where you're going along your desired path, then the bike magically follows right where your eyes aim. If you look at a path along the road, you will travel that path. If you look at a tree, then you will hit the tree. Although it seems like common sense, it was actually quite amazing when it was practiced.

It's kind of funny how this simple instruction on the fundamentals of motorcycle riding actually propagated into life's little travels as well. You will always go where you look! If you look ahead at a negative outcome then, indeed, you will encounter a negative outcome. However, if you look ahead at the ultimate Vision you desire, then, certainly, you will arrive safely.

Of course, you must always monitor "the other guy" while riding your motorcycle down the road. Indeed, someone won't see you or, in many cases, won't care, and simply dart out of nowhere and run you down. As in life, always be on the lookout for the odd little obstacles that appear as they will either stop you cold, or cause you to react and learn from the encounter. Always take each and every encounter, on your bike, and in life, as a lesson in becoming a better rider.

In all cases, it is better to actively look than to simply watch. Never take your eyes off the road, be alert at all times, ensure that your vehicle is in good shape, and take a break when you get tired. By looking, acting, and reacting appropriately, you can ensure your safe travels and a successful arrival at your destination.

Edward B. Toupin is an author, publisher, life-strategy coach, counselor, Reiki Master, technical writer, and PhD Candidate living in Las Vegas, NV. Among other things, he authors books, articles, and screenplays on topics ranging from career success through life organization and fulfillment. Check out some of his recent print and electronic books as well as his articles covering various life-changing topics! For more information, and to find out about his upcoming title on book publishing, e-mail Edward at

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