

*Join us on a journey back to old memories and the formation of new memories in our hearts.*

## ON THE RAILS AGAIN

July 2004

I wake up to a dark bedroom but notice the light is on in the bathroom. Oh! It can't be morning already! Suddenly realization hits. YES!!!! This is July 2, 2004, the morning of the start of another of our great adventures. Jim is in the shower so I head for the kitchen. Ah, yes, coffee is already brewing. Each year my five kids get together for their annual Faist Kids' Reunion over the Fourth of July. It is being held this year in Janesville, Wisconsin, at my son Randy's home. We have often heard that getting there should be half the fun so we have planned our trip with Amtrak.

A few final items are packed, cold soda is pulled from the fridge, and we drive the white Buick through the pre-dawn streets of Lynchburg, Virginia, toward Kemper Street Station. McDonalds informs us that we are too early to buy sausage biscuits. So much for breakfast for now.

Garland Harper, the attendant, is already on duty at the Amtrak station. He advises us to check our bags. Hopefully, the railroad does a better job of getting them to Chicago than the airlines or we will be making a trip to the Janesville, Wisconsin, Wal-Mart. Our train #20 is only about ten minutes behind schedule and we wait with anticipation as Garland gives Jim a list of frequencies for the scanner.

The PA crackles to life at 6AM and we funnel outside to await our Chariot of Steel. The conductor tells us there are only five seats available as we board. Oh, yes, coach #25018 of The Crescent is packed with still-sleeping people.

As daylight overtakes darkness, we are hurtling along through a lush forest of fresh green foliage, drenched in dense fog. Near Culpeper, the sun fights its way through the fog and a pretty rural scene unfolds. People are slowly coming to life around us and are straggling toward the diner for breakfast. We are hungry, too, (Remember, McDonalds was closed this morning.) but have packed some snacks and soda. Soon we are in Manassas, Virginia, and are immersed in industry and housing complexes.

It is almost 9:30AM when Washington, DC, comes into view. Crape Myrtles frame our glimpses of the Washington Monument, the Capitol, the Potomac, and a cluster of huge old buildings. My nose prickles and tears well as a surge of pride and emotion sweeps across my heart. Because this is Friday, the world outside our window is a beehive of activity and traffic.

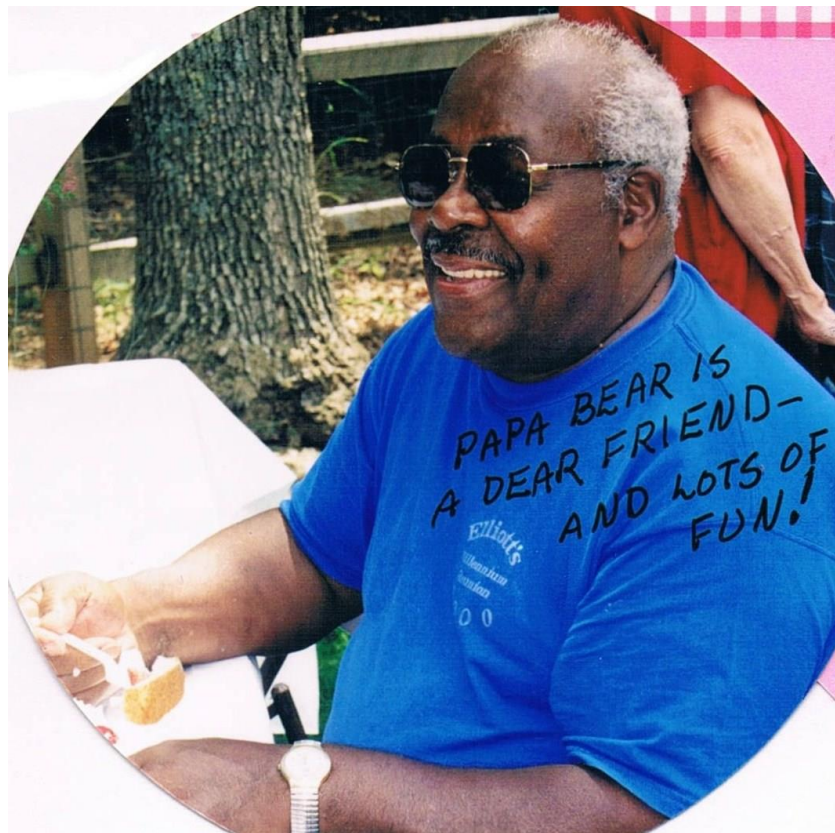
At Washington, DC's, Union Station many of our fellow travelers "de-train" as we wait among trains on every side. OOPS! All the fans whir to silence and the lights fade. We may be here a

while. “They are changing engines,” the conductor informs us. I notice the platform beside us sports ornate pillars from a time of previous grandeur. My mind drifts to times long ago and I can mentally see and hear the throng of people, ladies in heavy long dresses and men with their natty attire and spats, milling among those fancy pillars of yesteryear as they board steam trains for their own great quests.

Forty five minutes have passed pleasantly. A chat with a man from upper New York State makes us appreciate the cost of living in Lynchburg.

Once again, we are rocking northward, meeting an army of commuter trains. It is quiet in this coach with only about 25 percent of the seats occupied now. The sun glows down its heat but we are cool---almost too cool---in our shiny metal and glass cocoon.

In a flash we are approaching Baltimore, Maryland, and we wonder how our old friend Papa Bear Smothers is doing.



He moved here last year.

Our train travels through almost two miles of Howard Street Tunnel under the downtown. In July 2001 a train carrying hazardous material caught fire in this tunnel and burned for several days. We roll to a stop beside beautiful old Penn Station but two MARC trains steal our view of the building's glory.

The electric locomotive soon speeds us through a depressed area north of the station and, again, we appreciate Lynchburg all the more. Johns Hopkins Medical Center is to our right. Our minds are filling with memory bytes even though our trip is still young.

A gorgeous expanse of water, dotted with boats and gulls on both sides of us, proves to be the northern end of Chesapeake Bay. Sailboats and mammoth white steel bridges accent the crystal blue of the water. Jim is impressed that the old Pennsylvania Railroad interlocking tower still stands at the north end of the Susquehanna River Bridge.

Soon we are in Wilmington, Delaware. Neither Jim nor I have ever been to Delaware before so it is a big deal for us. We marvel at the Kalmar Nyckel, a triple mast ship that is moored along a part of the Delaware River. This boat is a replica of the original one which sailed in 1638 from Sweden, carrying 24 passengers to settle the Delaware Valley. The current model has been in service since 1998 and is used for tours and educational programs. Wilmington is a-bustle with building projects and tall cranes. Unlike Baltimore, the track here slides along, high above the cityscape. Its grand red brick station bespeaks of finer times and is waiting for its turn for a much needed loving facelift.

Leaving Wilmington, we begin to pack up our belongings. Only about twenty more miles to Philadelphia! Laundry, hanging on back porches, waves at us as we pass by in the noonday sunshine.

Tugboats are creating wakes along the wide Delaware River. This river makes the Mississippi at Savanna, Illinois, look like Cranes Grove Creek. Near Chester, Pennsylvania, the toll bridge from Pennsylvania to New Jersey looms high in the distance. What a magnificent structure!

It is mostly non-stop factories, oil storage facilities, commerce, and commuter trains from DC to Philadelphia.

Hooray! We are in Philadelphia on time---six hours and six minutes from Lynchburg. We climb the stairs into the center of grand old 30<sup>th</sup> Street Station, resplendent with its Italian marble columns and age-polished gold leaf panels. The focal point of The Grand Hall is the Angel of Resurrection, a bronze statue of an angel holding a fallen hero of World War II, in tribute of 1,304 Pennsylvania Railroad employees who gave their lives in that war.



About 95 feet above that is the intricately designed ceiling with squares of brass and gold. Ceiling-high windows shed natural light on the multitude of travelers below as birds flit across the vast cavern. In the North Waiting Hall is the restored “Progress of Transportation” plaster bas-relief created in 1895 and saved when the original station burned.



We wonder what it would cost to build such a spectacular structure today.

This place was not built with acoustics in mind and the roar of humanity is deafening. Those floors covered with hand laid Tennessee marble sure don't help the situation any. We roam the food court and find a couple of yummy chicken sandwiches at McDonalds. Thankfully, there are large umbrellas over our table so no flying bird will add unwanted condiments to our lunch. A search for a brass cut-out suncatcher souvenir in the gift shops surrounding The Grand Hall yields zip.



We sit in The Grand Hall and wait for the boarding call for our train, The Three Rivers to Chicago.



My mind takes off again, transporting itself back in time to when this station was new in 1934. This building is older than me. My pal Edna once told me I was older than dirt so this place is pretty old. They are building a new station next door but I sure hope they have the good sense to keep this one, too.

A line forms by the boarding gate and we join the queue until a Redcap offers to board us early. Oh, yes, that seems like a good plan and well worth his tip. He proves to be a chatty fellow and is full of “train talk”. The entire coach is full of Chicago-bound passengers. We had been told by Garland that eighty nine people were scheduled to get on this train in Philadelphia so seating is scarce.

Only five minutes late leaving the station---Chicago, here we come!

A group of teens are onboard. They are returning to Chicago after a week of volunteer work in New York City. Their tales of their escapades are fascinating. These kids are still running on adrenaline. Their leader clues us in on what a great bunch of kids they are---not a tattoo or nose ring visible on the whole troupe.

We see signs for Malvern, Pennsylvania, and Jim recalls when his brother and sister-in-law, Denny and Jan, lived there. His mom used to take the Crescent to visit them and they met her in Wilmington because that station was easier to get to than Philadelphia’s.

A few miles out of Philadelphia we are in the Pennsylvania Dutch Country. The farms are pristine, crops are flourishing, the laundry is undulating in the breeze. Only one buggy comes into view though. It is fun to roll by spots where we parked last fall during our trip to this area. Lots of corn and tobacco fills the countryside.



Three Mile Island, along the Susquehanna River (We saw that same river earlier today in Maryland.) near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, sparks our interest. We ride for miles along that graceful river as boats stir up the water. This is one mighty wide river.

In Harrisburg we see the capitol building, dwarfed by the skyscrapers around it.

The kids from Chicago are upset. Conductors won't let them play cards in the club car---and we are 30 minutes behind schedule as we cross the Susquehanna on the longest stone arch bridge in the world.

Gardens, full of humongous cabbages, decorate the valleys as we thread our way through the mountains of Pennsylvania. The sun is drifting toward the horizon.

Altoona, Pennsylvania's, rail yards are impressive. The Railroaders' Memorial Museum is also here. Jim sees that Alto Tower still stands at the base of the grade. This is where pushers are added to westbound trains to get them over the mountains.

Hooray! The sun stayed up long enough so we can see world famous Horseshoe Curve in daylight. What a marvel of engineering. During the mid-1800's the Pennsylvania Rail Road was building its tracks through the area but encountered terrain too steep for their tracks. Instead, they followed a ravine, sliced off the face of a mountain, and filled in another ravine, forming a three mile long horseshoe shape that effectively reduced the grade from 4.37% to 1.75%, which made for much easier travel. Jim watches for the spot where he and several other railfans camped at Bennington Curve fifteen years ago. Our train #41 glides down the other side of the mountain as the sun disappears behind trees.

Now we zig zag our way between mountains as our world darkens around us. The coach lights have come on and we settle in for a swaying ride in the night. We have traveled nearly 550 miles on two trains so far today. Only about 575 more miles to Chicago and 13 more hours---if we stay on schedule.

The teenagers are happy. A new crew of attendants is letting them play cards in the club car. The coach becomes much quieter and Johnstown, Pennsylvania, is before us. This is the site of the terrible killer flood in 1889 when 20 million gallons of water was dumped on the town after dams burst. In 1936 the town was again inundated by floods from snowmelt. The rains of 1977 created yet another flood as dams burst from heavy rains and dumped 128 million gallons on the town. Shortly after the 1889 flood an incline plane railroad was built, partly as an escape avenue for future floods. This track has a 71percent grade up Yoder Hill and is billed by Guinness Book of Records as the steepest vehicular inclined plane in the world.



As our train pauses at the station, we watch the lighted cars ascend and descend the mountainside. I DON'T THINK SO, THANK YOU! Steel mills are still lit but only running at a fraction of their capacity. A gold-topped onion-dome church graces the downtown and an anodized brass-roofed church stands around a curve. Such beauty and rich heritage is in this town. The Little Conemaugh riverbanks are tamed with vast stretches of concrete.

Eventually exhaustion and sleep win their battle with "I want to see EVERYTHING!" I begrudge the darkness for keeping its visual secrets.

The kids return from the club car and I fall asleep amid their happy chatter.

North of Pittsburgh my consciousness comes back as we follow the beautiful Ohio River for miles. President George W. Bush made famous the term "A Thousand Points of Light", but, along this stretch of the trip, there are literally thousands of points of commerce and factory light along the opposite riverbank. Houseboats are moored at the shore and tugs maneuver their

charges. A big orange moon casts its reflection on the silver-mirror water.

Again, I doze. Occasionally a passing train explodes past my window and jars me awake. We are somewhere in Ohio farm country. Every little town has its elevator and lumber yards which reflect the flashing red lights of crossing gates. More “thousand points of light” are the yard lights that dot the countryside. Too many times I stir and realize we are sitting still. I wonder where we are. Gradually awareness surfaces and the eastern sky shows just a smidgeon of red. Soon that orange moon begins to fade to a creamy lemon color, and then disappears into daylight. Oh, such a sumptuous feast for my eyes as I admire miles of farmland, wheat ready for harvest, newly planted soybeans, and corn about to tassel.

About 6:30AM we are finally able to discern our location, Tiffany, Ohio. We are about 2 ½ hours behind schedule now.

This part of the world looks like a giant patchwork quilt with all its squares of gold and green crops.

Oh, oh! We rumble to a halt again. Dark green corn spreads as far as we can see in every direction. So much for catching that 10:35 bus from Chicago to Janesville. This is a lesson in patience and we need to smell the roses along this detour. A wild grapevine winds its way up a fence post beside my window. I think it has climbed higher since we’ve been stopped here. Wonder how long till it starts up the side of this coach? OOOPS! The mind is free-wheeling this morning. We are now 3 hours behind the timetable.

Hooray! We are on the move again. Jim comments that if Amtrak came thru Rochelle Rail Park, we would have to ask what day to expect it, not what hour. My husband is getting antsy.

We are traveling almost straight west now, through a fertile area of wheat fields. Grain bins and elevators stand guard on every horizon.





The green and gold patchwork quilt continues to awe us with its simple beauty.

Five miles east of the Indiana state line we are stopped again. More corn but more trees, too, are in our view. Wild roses show their pretty pink faces beside our track. Canadian thistles are about to open their purple flowers. Depending on how long we stay here, we may just see them bloom.

This is a short stop but now we are 3 ½ hours from Chicago. They tell us that overnight we were stopped two hours for a disabled freight load of hazardous materials ahead of us. (I thought we were sitting a long time overnight.) The teens are getting restless and their cell phones are ringing.

The farther west we go, the more trees and less sweeping vistas there are. Our morning sun is hiding behind clouds. I see a farmer who has quit combining wheat and is busily baling up the windrowed wheat straw before the rain invades.

Motor boats are already out on Lake Wawasee, their pilots celebrating the holiday in their own way. Such a good day for fishing and enjoying our hard-earned freedom.

East of Nappanee, Indiana, we gape in awe at numerous irrigation systems spraying their liquid gold over the thirsty crops. The depot in Nappanee is a dark red brick building with pretty windows and has flowers all around it and a gazebo beside it. We see well-kept gardens with potatoes in bloom next to freshly painted Amish farmsteads. West of town we encounter the misty rain.

The conductors are collecting trash and pillows so they must be serious about getting to Chicago today.

We spot the Gary Works and various other steel mills, and then see Lake Michigan. It looks almost green today with no sunshine. Too bad the farmers in Indiana can't tap into the lake for their irrigation systems.

10:20AM Central Time, July 3; only fifteen miles to go. We see a patch of wildflowers in profuse bloom, tucked between the tracks. Casino signs soar above the area. Construction traffic on I80/90 isn't moving any faster than we are. We inch along, way below the Chicago Skyway. Waves of seagulls fly away from rooftops as Jim spots the Sears Tower in the haze.



The bus we were supposed to be riding to Janesville has just left. Guess this means we won't have lunch at Randy's. We roll through a staging yard for container trains. Many of the houses along the tracks don't look "so pretty good". In our minds, Lynchburg looks awfully good. The stadium of the Chicago White Sox comes into view.



The kids are starting to collect their things and you can sense the excitement in their laughter. It was a memory-filled trip to New York for them but I think they are ready to go back to their own world. Skyscrapers of downtown Chicago are in a blue smog.

11AM Central time and we are stopped a mile from Union Station. Potential problem: we are now backing up---actually, at a faster speed than we came through here before. This does not

bode well and the kids joke that we are heading back to New York. Oh, they are backing into the station.

11:30AM, 3 ¾ hours late, we collect our luggage. It actually made it here instead of to Utah or Texas. Hooray!! The grandkids will be happy to get their gifts.

Now we wait for the 12:30 bus. Jim is roaming the station and I'm doing sentry duty for the luggage. Union Station, like 30<sup>th</sup> Street Station, is a roar of noise but it is fun to stand here and watch people pass by. My clothes are very conservative compared to those of some other travelers.

The bus is here, Jim gets the baggage loaded, and I choose a seat.

The trip to Janesville, Wisconsin, is interesting for me. New buildings have sprung up but a few familiar ones no longer have names in front of them and "For Sale or Lease" signs are there instead. One motel is completely gone along the tollway. I suspect that, after I left the state, relinquishing my self-proclaimed "Dishonorable CEO of Illinois" duties, everything went to pot.

Our bus pulls into the Janesville facility where Lori is waiting for us in the rain. My kids have been checking our progress on the internet and knew when to expect us.

Randy and Monica's home is strangely quiet when we arrive.



Cindy is cleaning, Sandi is dealing with the little kids in "The Man Room" (Randy's multimedia center) downstairs, Monica and Ellen have gone for more supplies, and the guys are all at a paintball facility.



Soon the guys return and things get lively. They have a fine time comparing bruises and aches. I remember my late brother-in-law, Kelly's, question many years ago when this same crew returned from another paintball outing and they were comparing bruises and welts at the farm near Freeport, Illinois. "This is supposed to be fun?"

Oh, the din of a pack of excited cousins, seven little kids, ages seven and under, in the same house---and it is raining outside. Gramma and Jim's gifts of Dairy Queen certificates, light-up jewelry, and bright colored boas are a hit. Silver sparkly threads are strewn all over the house. *The kids below are Abby, Anna, Morgan, Emma and Amelia.*



Aunt Cee Cee follows behind them with the vacuum cleaner---but she doesn't get all the silver stuff and the house looks like Christmas.

We dine on grilled chicken, Ellen's oven-baked potatoes, salads, and scads of leftovers. *That's Monica (and Miranda) below.*





A NASCAR race is on TV tonight and, due to rain delays, it finishes at midnight. Much needed showers follow; then we re-hash the day's events for another hour. My world is so full of love and peace.

Morning, July 4, comes WAY too soon but the biscuits and sausage hit the spot. There are grandkids all over the place and this gramma is happy. Twenty one people slept here overnight. Wonderful chaos reigns and silver sparkly threads (from those boas) still accent the floors. It is cloudy. We hope the rains hold off until after the fireworks tonight.

At 10:30AM Randy and Jim leave for town. One of Randy's tenants is a conductor for the Wisconsin and Southern Railroad and she has arranged a tour of the Janesville Yards for Jim. You didn't have to ask Jim twice on that one.

Soon Bill and Sue Pickett from Monroe, Wisconsin, arrive.



Donna Cornelius and her daughter, Sue, from Freeport and Forreston, Illinois, follow them. I feel so blessed to have such good friends. We chat for hours, catching up with each others' lives.



Donna and Sue bring huge sacks of Mrs. Mike Potato Chips. Mrs. Mike is a local brand in Freeport and is a family favorite. I crave those things.

Jim and Randy return, full of enthusiasm for their excursion. The Shop Manager of the yards gave Jim and Randy a tour of the shops, yard, and roundhouse. He then told them that his crew needed to move some locomotives around and, "Would you like to go along for the ride?" Jim had to think about that---all of a half second. Jim comments that he didn't take very many pictures---maybe only 15 or so.

The day is good, the sun comes out, the little kids swim in the pool.





All twenty five of us eat too much (grilled brats and burgers and all the trimmings plus a good many Mrs. Mike chips) while this beautiful home is filled with love and laughter.

Family picture time on the upper deck is a major event. Lots of film is used. Just try to get twenty one people to all look at the camera at one time.



At 4<sup>th</sup> of July 2004 reunion at Randy's home near Janesville, WI.  
L to R Back: Ellen (Mrs. Larry) Faist, Cindy (holding Ben) and Fred (holding Abby) Watson, Jeff and Lori McCarthy, Mark and Sandi Parsons, Monica (Mrs. Randy) Faist.  
Center: Larry (holding Emma and Anna) Faist, Lin and Jim (holding Morgan and Justin Parsons) Moseley, Randy (holding Amelia) Faist.  
Front: Ryan and Matthew McCarthy

Then there is the episode of getting a good picture of Jim and Gramma with nine grandkids. I wish for a video camera to record the antics of the adults who are trying to get the little kids to all



smile for the cameras.





Amid hugs, our four friends leave for their homes and, as usual, my nose prickles and the tears well. They are such special people and I love them so very much. I use Lori's free weekend cell minutes to chat with several other very good friends. It would have been so good to see them, but time is too short this trip.

Time to get this army on the move to the Milton, Wisconsin, fireworks. Twenty one people in four vehicles invade the high school front lawn. The younger generation talks their uncles into taking them to the carnival across the street. *The crew below is Morgan (Sandi's), Uncle Larry, Anna (Larry's), Justin (Sandi's), Amelia (Randy's), Emma (Larry's), Abby (Cindy's) and Uncles Randy and Freddie.*



They return with treasures of blinking necklaces and cotton candy.



As we wait for the show to begin, Larry does his annual “toss kids in the air” routine. The little ones squeal with delight.



The aunts have packed a commodious supply of treats---even some of Aunt Ellen’s homemade chocolate cupcakes---and boxed drinks. Chairs and blankets are spread for all of us.



Soon the entire area is filled with other families and darkness prepares the world around us for the holiday celebration of our freedom.

The show is great---even better than last year. All too soon it is over and everybody heads back to Randy and Monica’s home. Sleeping kids are tucked into bed and most of the adults relax in front of the TV or on the upper deck. Jim and I are pooped so we hit the hay.

Monday morning, July 5, arrives and Jim and I hunt for coffee. Monica, Amelia, and I make a beeline for the grocery store. They buy Krispy Kreme Donuts and I lay in a supply of soda and crackers for our trip home. When we get back, most everybody is up---waiting for those Krispy Kremes!

Jim and I pack up our belongings (and find a couple of those infamous silver threads). Abby, age 3, joins us and asks for a package of crackers, then announces that she needs five more for her cousins. I explain to Emma, age 6, that we need to catch the bus to Chicago and then the train home. She asks, “Does that train go all the way over the ocean?” Emma lives in Shanghai, China, so her experience of going home includes a long flight over an ocean.

Suitcases are loaded in the rental car, hugs are collected, and we are off, ready to embark on our homeward-bound journey. Oh, it is SO hard to say good-bye.

The bus to Chicago is full and one man sits on the steps at the front. I watch the corn and beans stretch beside our window. I lived in Illinois fifty seven years before moving to Virginia so my roots are deep here. My life in Virginia with Jim is the best I’ve ever had. I’d never move back to Illinois, but the tentacles of my heritage wrap more tightly around my heartstrings each time I visit. I am not getting any younger and wonder each time if I will return. There are so many people here that I love dearly. I am so very blessed to have good friends and relatives and memories of a great childhood in Illinois, in addition to having a special life in beautiful Virginia.

Wonderful old Union Station in Chicago still wears its marble columns and arches with historic pride.



High up near the 112-foot ceiling in The Great Hall is an arched balcony and my mind is off and running again. The memories wash over me. This time the year is 1957 and I am a high school freshman on a pre-Christmas jaunt with my mom. We had ridden the Land of Corn from



Freeport to Chicago one mid-December day to see the beautiful Christmas decorations of Chicago. After a long and satisfying day, we had found our way back to Union Station to return home. As we waited, we admired a floor-to-ceiling Christmas tree while every fifteen minutes a different choral group from various Chicago area schools and churches sang carols from that arched balcony high above this great hall. Mom and I sat patiently waiting for our train and discovered a German Valley soldier, Roger Ackerman (dad of Laurie, Brad, and Stephanie), waiting there, too, in his Army uniform. It was so good to see a familiar face that day. I close my eyes today and can still hear the music and remember the wonderful day with my mom. Wouldn't she just inhale a trip like Jim and I are taking this week?

But this is July 5, 2004, and Jim and I are waiting here, this time for our trip home to Lynchburg, Virginia. Jim is busy with his camera and I am composing this version of "War and Peace" for some round file in the future. Our suitcases are checked and we cool our heels, munching yet another chicken sandwich from McDonalds.

An hour and ten minutes late we are on the move, sitting in the upper level of super-liner car #34086 of the Capitol. We still have a little bit of daylight left to see the streets of South Chicago skim by.

In the seat ahead of us is a couple from Kansas City. They are both in their eighties. The lady is "dressed to the nines", with a blue and white polka dot dress and a jacket appliquéd with stars and flags. Her perfectly combed carrot-red hair sports a bouncing gold filigree butterfly. Her fingers are weighted down with huge diamond rings. She is also wearing a pair of silver Nike running shoes with the toes cut out. Ahh, comfort! They are going to a convention of The Daughters of the American Revolution that is being held next week in Washington, DC. She boasts of being able to trace no less than six ancestors in that war.

Beside us are two retired school teachers who are going home to Maryland from Tucson. They are seasoned travelers and have a personal DVD player with them so they spend the evening with earplugs attached.

In Elkhart, Indiana, we spot a New York Central museum with numerous restored cars and locomotives. Those locomotives look to be in fine shape.

Because of the late departure from Chicago, the dining car is behind schedule, too. We have reservations for a 9:30PM dinner but give up on that plan and buy sandwiches from the lounge car. The attendant at the snack spot is a cheery gal. We later learn that this is one of her last trips on her job. She is on morphine to combat the pain of cancer.

Night takes over our senses after northern Indiana fades from view and we sleep through Ohio. Before dawn I spot that gorgeous Ohio River again on the north edge of Pittsburgh. Daylight wins its tug of war with the darkness and we head for the observation car. Oh, what a glorious



sight! Pittsburgh is a pretty city with oodles of bridges and beautiful old buildings tucked among glass skyscrapers. We see the Monongahela River, then inch our way through southern Pennsylvania along the Youghiogheny riverbanks. Mountains tower beside us and above us. Wheel flanges squeal their protest of the constant curves. At one point we are stopped and Jim notes the odd angle of the car just behind us. Bright orange wildflowers decorate the trackside and we are in a lush green jungle. We are barely moving. A kayak is coming down the river ahead of us and two fishermen are angling in the hip-deep water. Vehicles pass us, laden with boats and fishing gear.

Our lead engine on this train is #25. We catch sight of farms nestled among mountain glens. Jim listens to the scanner and reports that the engineer has been told to make a lot of noise. Our engineer cooperates with an almost constant string of haunting whistle blasts. We soon see workers alongside the tracks. Numerous tunnels blink away the sunlight. A silver mailbox, with its flag up, is nailed to a tree along a dirt path across the tracks. A shanty huddles in the underbrush behind it. The Castleman River takes over escort duties as we continue to lace our way through the southern Pennsylvania mountains.

Salisbury Viaduct, formerly a part of the Western Maryland Railroad, now a bike path, floats overhead. High on a ridge of mountains the 10AM brilliant sunshine illuminates a wind farm and the blades are whirling in the breeze. Below the wind farm is a basin of green, sprinkled with sunwashed farms near Meyersdale, Pennsylvania. Keystone Viaduct frames our view of more giant white windmills that seem to scrape at the jewel-tone blue sky.

Our silver chariot struggles up Sandpatch Grade and slithers through the nearly mile-long Sandpatch Tunnel. Sunlight sparkles on the white daisies and purple and pink wildflowers on our descent down the grade toward Cumberland, Maryland.

A tidy white church is the focal point of Glencoe, Pennsylvania. An elderly man is playing tag with his lawnmower and all is well today.

All is NOT well with the woman who stops by our seat to chat. She wonders how far she is from civilization and is angry that the train is going too slow. She wants to get home to DC to see her cat---and also her husband---in that order, I think.

Our track leads us through “The Narrows” just before Cumberland, Maryland. Cumberland is an old city, graced with an abundance of church steeples.

A bridge across the Potomac puts us into West Virginia and we follow that river almost to Martinsburg. Numerous tunnels are along the way. Jim points out a sight where he camped about twenty years ago.

Harpers Ferry is soon in front of us. We think of history and trains of long ago. This town is full

of tourists today.

Northeastern West Virginia passes by our windows and we see many apple and peach trees, heavy with fruit.

Point of Rocks, Maryland, glides by. That wonderful station still is in use despite its need for restoration. I remember a very chilly April day a few years ago when we visited this area after attending Dalton's birthday party in Sterling, Virginia.

One stop before our destination of Washington, DC, the lady who was anxious to see her cat loses her patience with Amtrak and chooses to get off in Rockville, Maryland, so she can continue the trip on the commuter trains. She had been telling us that she instructs classes of Buddhism and the Zen religion, which teaches patience and love. OK.....

We are arriving in DC when the announcement is made that someone "mistakenly" picked up another passenger's cell phone and would they please return it. You know that will never happen and we chat with the man who lost his phone.

Our train pulls into the station about three hours late. Heat hits us in the face as we make the long hike to the station. Union Station DC was built in 1907 and has been restored to its original beauty. Its 96-foot barrel-vaulted ceilings are adorned with seventy pounds of 22-karat gold leaf. There are more than 130 shops and restaurants here. After a trip through some souvenir shops, (still hunting for those brass sun catchers) we find the food court and enjoy huge plates of Chinese orange chicken...YUM!

Our wait for the Crescent to Lynchburg seems short as we chat with a lovely gal from California who is going to Charlottesville, Virginia, for her father's funeral. At the gate we find ourselves beside Gary, the man who lost his cell phone. He tells us of his hassles with Verizon regarding his lost phone.

Just as we reach our coach, Gary realizes that he has left his larger bag in the waiting room so we take his carry-on and he races back to the terminal. That poor man is having a lousy day so far. After we get on the train Jim mentions to an attendant that he has Gary's bag but does not see Gary. Talk about opening up Pandora's Box! The attendant notifies police and an officer takes the bag off the train for a search. By that time Gary finds us, looking for his bag. The PA system is announcing that Gary shall step out on the platform and Jim goes with him. The gal from California and I joke whether Jim will get frisked. Eventually, everything is sorted out. Caution is a sign of our times.

At 7:30PM, we are on our way south at last and we pass over the Potomac River again. The water is glass-smooth tonight as sailboats dance across it. I see Reagan Airport and my mind flits back to 2000, vividly remembering sitting in the middle of the Potomac in a driving

rainstorm aboard an amphibious tour duck, watching planes descend overhead. Lori, her boys, Cindy, Jill, Dalton, and I were in DC that day for a tour and we got soaked. Such a fun, memory-filled day!

Our trip home flies by. Gary stops at our seat to apologize to Jim for all his trouble. We discover he is a railfan like Jim and they have a great conversation. Such an interesting man! He even knows the town of Freeport, Illinois, having sold flowers to Deininger Floral.

At Charlottesville we say our good-byes to the pretty blonde from California. Chances are slim to none that our paths will ever cross again but we know she exists and we are richer for it. She throws us a kiss from the platform as our train moves on. Instinct tells me we are leaving someone special!

Sixteen year old Eddie wants to know about Jim's scanner. He seems to be a good kid. He and his sister are returning to Bedford, Virginia, from Philadelphia where they toured all the historic sites.

Lynchburg rolls into view at 11:30PM on July 6, 2004, after 2,061 miles on the rails. We stand on the station platform and watch as the Crescent disappears into the night on its way to New Orleans. Would we take this trip again? What do you think?