

*We are on the road again.*

## Weekend Getaway

Today is June 16, 2006. It is 5:39 AM, the birds are already chirping, the moon is still up, a few clouds are lazily floating across the sunrise, but it looks like a great day ahead! A westbound train shoots over the bridge ahead of us on Timberlake Road as we head out of town. The second locomotive is a Union Pacific. Oh, yes, it will be a good day. We drive along, enveloped in waves of gauzy mist. That mist tries its best to hide the mountains but does not quite succeed.

It is 6:12 AM and a barber is already in his shop, hoping for a booming day of business. He is sitting by his window, reading the paper. No rush just yet.

The mist has disappeared. We head westward with a big red ball of sun glowing in our rear view mirror. All those floating clouds seem to have followed the mist into oblivion and our day is crystal clear as the mountains loom ahead of us. The welcome rain this past week has refreshed the lawns, making our world a pallet of lush greens, accented with tall spikes of white yucca blooms, colonies of bright pink sweet peas, and filmy Queen Ann's Lace. The hillsides are alive with lavender crown vetch and white daisies. I am so very blessed to live in this beautiful world!

A field of sweet corn along our way is "thigh-high" well before the Fourth of July. An old crow is a customer at the latest road-kill café. We start our usual Cow-Counting contest, but one man, who shall remain nameless in this account, tries to cheat by claiming the deer he sees should count double. No way, Jose.

Two hours from home and we are in Clifton Forge. The sign advertises "Magic in the Mountains" for this weekend. A whole lot of setting up is left to do before this little town will turn into a street carnival.

Westvaco Paper Mill has the city of Covington, Virginia, blanketed in a smoggy haze of smoke and steam.....and it doesn't smell so pretty good either. I suppose that is the smell of money.

As is customary on these trips, we stop at Moss Run, the most peaceful place I know. We sit quietly and just enjoy the tranquility.



Birds are busy at their task of being birds and a distant owl adds his whistley soft “Hoo, hoo, hoo” to the chorus. The clunk of expanding sun-warmed rails startles me. I drift into dreams of Indians and deer traipsing these mountains so long ago. I wonder, “What would those people think of our lives filled with computers and TVs and microwaves?” Yesterday at work Peggy told me to think of her during our trip. Sure, I do. My thoughts go something like, “Naah, naah, naah, naah, naah, naah.”

After a drought of train traffic, the scanner tells the story of an eastbound coal train which cannot make it up the mountain west of Tuckahoe (just across the state line into West Virginia). A westbound hopper train is sent to the rescue. We drive to Alleghany to get pictures of the CSX impromptu tow service in action. Ah, success!

Along the way we pass the home of an extremely patriotic person. The Confederate flag is displayed on the side of a very dilapidated outhouse.

Our next stop is Ronceverte, West Virginia, where we see that the “tow train” has found his hopper cars back and is, once again, heading westward.

We have visited Ronceverte numerous times in the past four years and often pass an appliance store with an old fashioned cook stove in the front window. Today opportunity knocks and I am able to go into the store for a closer look. Imagine my surprise when I find that this is, indeed, a wood-burning cook stove ..... not a make-believe model with electric or gas burners. An instruction booklet in the warming oven (about face high) gives complete directions for wood burner cooking. Oh, the memories of childhood that stove generates. The large black model with the warming oven is made in China. The sleeker white model comes from Tennessee. Either one can be mine for only \$1,300.00. A salesman wants to know which one I wish to purchase today. Maybe not! He then gives me brochures of more dependable units which come with electric or gas burners, manufactured in Canada. These little jewels are only \$4,000.00. For sure, not! An older couple on the sidewalk in front of the store share that they have an older

model and use it each winter for heat but it takes an awful lot of wood to bake a roast.

Clint Foster is a retired band teacher from Ohio who returned to his native West Virginia and moved to Ronceverte ten years ago. He and his wife, Joan, live in a pretty home and, don't you just know, Clint has a model train layout in his basement. Jim and I spend the next few hours wandering through the maze of tracks and bridges and duck-unders. This layout is in HO scale which means everything is 1/87 actual size. The trackage is nearly complete. When he gets all of the scenery in place, this will be one world-class display and I hope to be invited back someday to see it.

Bob Evans Restaurant in Lewisburg, West Virginia, fills our tummies, then we head for Super 8 for much needed rest.

Morning, June 17, dawns crystal clear and 52 degrees. A few miles east of Lewisburg on Interstate 64, the highway accords us a spectacular view of the Greenbrier River Valley. A profusion of steam rises above the Greenbrier with mountains for a backdrop. More poofs of steam rise above springs among the mountainsides --- and the sun is only too happy to showcase the entire beauty.

Oncoming traffic reveals a truck pulling a boat -- which isn't so unusual except that there is also a pick-up truck precariously balanced atop that boat. OK, so it is just the shell of a truck (no chassis) but it certainly does get my attention. Route 64 leads us through cool, shaded hallways with sheer, rocky tree-filled walls beside us.

One more time we make a detour to soak up more peace at Moss Run. It never disappoints us. Local squirrels scamper ahead of us as we pull into our favorite parking spot. Jim finds that the scraps of bread that he scattered by the tracks yesterday are gone this morning. Some animal or bird enjoyed a little treat. Jim hands me two tiny pieces of glistening coal. It will join other miniature rocks on the shelves beside our kitchen sink. A crow perches on a dead tree branch above us and caws his greeting. Mister Chipmunk pops his head above the tracks for a quick survey of the area, then disappears just as quickly. Butterflies flit above the ballast and white-winged birds search for morsels left behind by passing grain trains. Two squirrels sit, facing each other on the tracks, just daring a train to come by and disturb them. I think they are the same two rascals from the Geico Insurance ads. Somewhere in the distance a woodpecker is noisily remodeling a tree. Two young deer stop and look both ways before crossing the tracks. Their mama taught them well. Then they evaporate into the underbrush.

Too soon our Moss Run "serenity fix" is over and the little red Cavalier aims toward Clifton Forge. The C&O Historical Society, in conjunction with "Magic in the Mountains", is hosting a children's festival. There are balloons to inflate and caboose tours to guide.

We arrive in Clifton Forge and wonder where the crowd has gone. There isn't much going on in

town this morning. A number of beautifully preserved old cars are on display as we drive down Main Street. Once down by the tracks we discover the Children's Day affair has been greatly scaled back but the little kids are still enthused about climbing into the cabooses and the Combine Car. Jim chats with a local retired Amtrak engineer. A very spunky lady sits beside me and she reveals that she lived in Chicago for 25 years. She knows most of the adults coming through the train cars and happily stamps Chessie faces on the kids' hands.

A stop at Dairy Queen yields a couple of welcome hot dogs, then we leisurely meander towards Lynchburg. It has been a restful, happy trip but we need to go home. Granddaughter, Abby, and her buddy, Jeffery's pre-school graduation is tonight and we are armed with Chessie tee shirt gifts for the occasion.



Next stop: Illinois in two weeks. Jim just groans at that thought at the moment.