



BILL DAY EARNS MMR 510

I began railroading at age 4 with something like the Skaneateles wooden trains. Every year a wooden train appeared under the Christmas tree until the familiar Lionel loop succeeded it. Joshua Lionel Cowan's factory was in Irvington, New Jersey, two towns away, and I felt a kinship to a company that became, by 1950, arguably the largest toy manufacturer in the world.

By 1938 I was subscribing to *Model Railroader*, largely to get the cardboard engine house offered as a premium. By 1939 I had a 4x8-foot plywood pacific in my bedroom, waiting for an eventual working coal tippie and other units out of the irresistible Lionel catalogue. During World War II, when train parts were difficult to get, I pestered my father about getting a log loader for Christmas. In desperation, he finally turned to me and said that, if one didn't arrive at Christmas, he'd get me one — if I'd stop badgering. I was home free.

At War's end, the family was moving to California. I was finding myself somewhat frustrated with my train experience; among other things, I had tried to Scratchbuild a turntable but never got farther than a disc in a round hole. My father asked about disposing of the trains and, surprisingly, my younger sister said she wanted them. I, a future businessman, never saw it coming; she promptly sold the trains and pocketed the money.

In California, high school centered around girls, cars, and sometimes studying,

Real trains were now out of daily sight, a California commuter train occasionally rumbling through town. Trains that had been ubiquitous in my childhood had disappeared from view. During college, the Air Force and graduate school, trains were nowhere to be seen. And, as a young bachelor entering the workforce, trains and model trains continued to be among the missing.

However, soon happily married, the moment my first son arrived, trains reappeared. The first layout was a loop through a family room wall, an HO engine and cars that floated on a toy shelf, providently protected by a Plexiglas screen. (My second son, at two, surmounted the Plexiglas and disassembled everything. In a purely defensive move, I built an N gauge pike for him in the furnace room, but it was really too little too late).

As everyone knows, mature modeling doesn't really pick up until a house has a spare room or a cellar. Living in Maryland, I now had a cellar, a cellar big enough to hold my train table. I was proud of my efforts, building an access port for my layout and experimenting with artist's flocking for grass. Model Railroader accepted an article on the grass, but wanted me to revise it. (The revision never occurred). No one much saw my layout, but a 90-year-old friend, a real railroader who had once laid out a New York Central classification yard, cheered me on.

My company transferred me to Michigan where I built another layout and ones for my sons. My eldest son, now a lawyer, scratchbuilt jails, among other things, for his N scale layout. My youngest ignored everything, being fascinated with model rockets, and is now an airline captain. Meanwhile, I experimented with kits, painting with canister Floquil, and making access ports. Things were pretty primitive.

Eventually, transferred back to the Washington area, I landed in Virginia and a family room beautifully proportioned for a layout. Since one side of the room shared a wall with an unfinished furnace room, I cut holes in the wallboard and cantilevered benchwork on both sides of the common wall. The family room ended up with a shelf layout the length of the room, while the furnace room contained staging. My hopper cars, loaded with scale coal, could disappear through the wall and discharge their coal

in the furnace room. Optisensors told me which trains were in the staging area; with a flip of a switch, I could bring out a slow freight or a cannonball express. I also began experimenting with the Faller Road System, seeing model trucks disappear through the wall.

When the children had gone and the time came to move to a smaller house, I debated disassembling the layout and replacing the wallboard. Something made me hesitate, and the eventual buyer, an artist, bought the house partly for its layout in the family room, something he had always wanted.

My wife and I designed our current house, our retirement cottage, and she, daughter of an engineer/architect, announced that the layout would be off the kitchen. "When you retire," she said, "I want to see you, not the back of your head in the basement."

The current layout is small, but supremely accessible. Since I am a self-described Apostle of Animation, everything works: coal tipples, bascule bridges, elevators, conveyor belts, water plugs, water tanks and a turntable — everything for operation. No carousels. My daughter, at age six, had said, "Dad, the boys are always playing with trains. What do you have for girls?" What I have for girls is a Hon3 shortline, named for her, that services my mainline.

I eventually retired, taking an interest in national NMRA conventions, entering he major contests (I'm the most contestable person you've ever met). All contest models have been animated, whether coal tipples, blast furnaces, bascule bridges or Hulett ore unloaders. While I was contesting, I taught clinics in animation at conventions from Philadelphia to Milwaukee. My wife is the hero here. She would sometimes drive models to conventions while I flew. Eventually, I asked her to team-teach clinics and she did. Talk about support! And, after each award ceremony, I told people she could have back her kitchen table.

By some definitions, I'm not an expert modeler. It generally takes me three tries before I finish a kit or scratchbuild a model before I'm willing to show it to anyone. However you slice it, my adventures in modeling have been enormously satisfying. Everyone should try it! 🚂