

TRAINS

I was drooling over a picture of the latest Jaguar Convertible in the Wheels section of the Toronto Star the other morning. Over the years I've owned a lot of cars, starting with a 1934 Plymouth Coupe 'til now with a Ford Taurus and Valerie with a Focus ZX3 (the yellow demon). Each of the latter are so far superior in comfort, performance, ride and handling over my '34 Plymouth that there is no comparison, but I've never owned a convertible and likely never will unless we win the lottery - then people will expect you to act a little foolishly.

This caused me to look at the changes I have seen in some forms of transportation. I was a little after the horse drawn trams in Toronto but do remember the old rickety electrics with a driver at the front and a conductor (ticket taker) half way down at the rear doors. He also tended the coal stove during the winter months.

I developed a love affair with trains. I cannot really remember my first train ride but have been told it was a trip to a camp in the Mulmur Hills near Bolton. I do remember having a tussle with another lad and receiving a scratch on my face which in a couple of days developed into impetigo. This caused my Mother, young sister and I to be exiled in disgrace and sent home, by train of course and waving goodbye to my older sister, cousins and Aunt as we chugged away.

When we moved to Scarborough we were very close to the main CNR line to the East Coast. My Father also a train buff (probably wishing he were on one to escape for a while) knew the schedule. After Sunday School we would walk up Kennedy Road to the tracks to see the huge freight trains, hauled by three steam locomotives thunder by with box cars, oil cars and other odd looking items on the way to Montreal or ports in the Maritimes. There was a long grade for trains to climb starting at Main Street and ending east of Markham which required three and on rare occasions four engines. We would see the extra engine, having done its duty, coasting back to the rail yard later in the day.

We moved to Midland and since my Father did not own a car, we would travel back and forth to Toronto by train to visit or do some business. I never did fathom the complexity of the ticket. The conductor would tear off a piece and stick it on the window blind. I guess it told him where we were to get off but I chose to consider the ritual as a mystery.

The best train ride I can remember as a young lad was my trip to Quebec to attend cadet camp at Valcartier. I boarded a train at Union Station, crowded with other cadets and in reasonably tacky condition. I think they must have taken them out of obsolete storage,....we inched our way to Montreal, arriving it seemed very late at night and a trifle hungry having had only sandwiches and soda pop.

We were herded into another train and assigned a berth. When I awoke in the morning to whistles and shouting we were lined up and marched to trucks parked in the station in Quebec City and transported to the army camp. I can't honestly remember sleeping in a train since that time.

In my last few years at work I found using the train to Eastern Ontario the most convenient way when I didn't want to drive. I often travelled to Kingston, Brockville or Ottawa where I'd be met and travelled about the region. I chose 1st class and was treated to food and drink usually superior to airline food.

One Winter Valerie and I tired of the rat race decided to weekend in Montreal. We travelled 1st class by train in speedy comfort, rode the elevators up from the station to our suite in the Queen Elizabeth Hotel and led a pampered existence for three days - returning to Toronto in rested comfort to once again do battle.

One fall, a couple of years later we went with another couple by train to North Bay, travelled around the area by coach for several days and returned to Toronto by train. Again the food and hospitality were first class.

Since moving here we've never used the train although often friends would, we would pick them up and deliver them to the Belleville Station.

When we were in England this time last year we took a short train ride between towns in the Lake District. The engine was steam and the cars were ancient authentic, old but cleaner than the cars on my cadet trip.

So when we were planning a vacation trip this year we thought it would be exciting to incorporate some train travel if we could.

Well we've done so - in the middle of July we will fly to Calgary, board the 'Rocky Mountain Express Gold Leaf' for a trip through the Rockies. The train with dome cars

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