

## MY FASCINATION WITH TRAINS

*Text by Karl Milde*

My fascination with trains began long ago, when I was a small boy. After the Great War, my mother took my sister and me on a trip to visit her parents in Chicago. We boarded a train called the *Twentieth Century Limited* at Grand Central Station. I recall exploring the train from one end to the other as it sped along, clickity-clack on the track, and thereafter sitting down at a table with mom and sis in the dining car. We were served dinner by a dignified African-American waiter as the evening darkness descended outside.

When we arrived in Chicago, we changed to the *Rock Island Line* south to my grandparents' home, which was within walking (and hearing) distance from the local railroad station in the suburbs. I can remember like yesterday lying in bed at night listening to the steam engines starting up with a chuff...chuff...chuff, chuff, chuff, choo, choo. Sometimes the engineer applied too much steam and the drive wheels spun with a fast chuff-chuff-chuff. He had to quickly back off on the throttle so the wheels stopped slipping.

When I grew up a bit I "asked Santa" for an American Flyer starter train set with an engine, freight cars, and an oval track. Each year this set got bigger until it included much more track with switches, a station, and even a stockyard with a floor that vibrated to move miniature cattle around.

When I went away to college, I packed my model trains and stored them in the attic to play with much later. Later didn't happen, however, until one of my clients invited me to take a vintage steam train from Lexington Kentucky to Chattanooga and back, staying overnight in a sleeping car at Chattanooga station.

How could I say “no”? I reciprocated by sending him the train set as a gift. He wrote back effusively, saying I just made his day and probably his month too.

Most recently, I took a special tour of Grand Central Station (yes, there’s a control room with a huge floor-to-ceiling board showing all those train tracks, as you might imagine).

I also spent a whole year building model trains out of LEGOs. Perhaps you saw some of this set at the Toys-for-Tots program here at Heritage Hills in 2023.

My wife Cheryl and I also enjoy the train shows each Christmastime at both Lasdon Park and the New York Botanical Garden.

For a vacation next year, Cheryl and I have booked a “Grand Tour of Switzerland” entirely by rail, which includes travel on the *Gotthard Panorama Express*, *Golden Pass Line*, *Bernina Express*, *Glacier Express*, *Gornergrat Rack Railway*, *Junfrau Railway*, and of course the *Swiss Railway*.