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My Life On Mountain Railroads

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marriage performed near the end of the period in which the institution was practiced.

It is my impression that after Mary Goold came over the men were the next to come. They included John Gulliford and his sons Brigham Mon Victor and Richard John, my grandfather. It could be that women of the family, other than my grandmother, were also in the party. I have the distinct impression that my grandmother came over later with the children, including my father.

Upon arriving in the United States the family proceeded directly to Utah. Once there, the first order of business was to obtain employment. The basic skill of the male members of the family was mining coal; they knew little else. However, there were coal mines in Utah, most of them in Carbon County, some one hundred and twenty miles southeast of Salt Lake City. To these mines they took themselves, arriving at a dreary little place called Castle Gate. This name derived from two towering parapets of rock in the canyon of the Price River. The town, what there was of it, clung to the canyon walls and consisted of rude cottages, scattered randomly and punctuated by a company store, a mine office, a boarding house, and what passed for a depot, or station, on the narrow gauge railway that threaded its tortuous path through the Castle Gate and on up the canyon to cross the Wasatch range at Soldier Summit.

At the beginning of some fine work day in 1890, John Gulliford, Brigham Mon Victor, and Richard John presented themselves at the mine office. Luck was with some of them because the mine was hiring. John Gulliford and Brigham Mon Victor obtained jobs. Richard John was not hired. Being the runt of the family, he was told to come back tomorrow. Somewhat dejected, he went out of the office and sat down on the wooden steps fronting the narrow gauge mainline of the Rio Grande Western Railway. No doubt he was reflecting on the fact that life is unfair—as it always is.

But Lady Luck smiled on Dick the Devil and his descendants as well. He may not have deserved it, but I did! Along that crooked streak of narrow gauge rust that passed for a railroad came a section gang. On their pushcar they had long ties and heavier rail ready for the broad gauging of the Rio Grande.

Whatever else Dick the Devil may have been, he must have been, if even for one brief moment, resourceful. He got himself off those porch steps and went down and asked the section boss for a job. And he was hired on the spot. As he went trundling off after that pushcar, the entire horizon for my father, for me, and for my children was immensely altered. After

generations of our family being in those dirty old coalpits, we were now out in the sunshine and the weather, on the railroad, which could lead to anywhere. My father was fond of saying that this was the most single important event in the history of our family. In my adult life as a director of Kaiser Steel, I visited numerous coal mines in Utah and elsewhere. It was not uncommon even in the latter part of this century to find third- and fourth-generation coal miners. But for the grace of the good Lord and a railway section gang, I could have been one of them.

When musing on this, I always remember a warm experience I had with my father when I was about fourteen. Like so many of my incidents of learning, it happened on a railway locomotive, one of the ungainly mallets of the Utah Railway. Mallets were articulated locomotives which embodied two engine mechanisms, such as 2-6-0s or 2-8-0s, set under the same boiler. The two mechanisms were hinged or articulated in order to traverse curves easily. This configuration produced power at lower speeds and fuel economy, but the locomotives were difficult to maintain. The Utah Railway used mallets in mainline helper service on the westward ascent of the Soldier Summit grade and in the tramp mine runs from Martin to the various little mining towns in western Carbon County.

On this day we were on the mine run up the branch to National. We had brought a train of empties to be distributed to the various mines. Loaded cars then would be collected and assembled into a train for return to Martin.

These switching operations consumed most of two to three hours. Empty cars, hoppers, gondolas, and even boxcars to be side loaded would be positioned above the mine tipple. On a given trip to the mine the railroad tramp crews would try to place a two- or three-days' supply of cars in that position. Workmen called by the likely name of "car droppers" dropped the empty cars from their stored positions above the mine down a slightly descending grade, releasing the brakes of the cars by means of a three-foot hickory club applied through the spokes of the hand brake wheel. Riding a car slowly down the grade, controlling it with the hand brakes, a workman let it drift slowly under the tipple where the newly mined and sized coal poured in until evenly loaded. Once filled, the cars were dropped further downgrade to storage tracks where they were spotted with dogged-down hand brakes until picked up and assembled into a train by the rail crews. This was precisely what my dad and his crew were doing on this day.

These car droppers were usually well-built, husky young men. They carried their long hickory brake clubs as a badge of office. It was a form of unskilled labor, probably paying somewhat less than the underground

miner was paid. But I always thought it was a better job because it was above ground and in the unconfined world. I remember them as a jolly lot who called back and forth to each other in camaraderie and friendly derision as they dropped their cars down from the tipple on the adjoining tracks.

The aspect of this operation that I considered discouraging was that it was never done. As fast as the upper tracks were emptied of cars going to the tipple, some train crew would shove a new batch up the line to take their place. And as rapidly as the lower tracks accumulated a number of loads, they would be assembled into a train and taken off down the mountain. But this was the business of mining—and railroading.

While Dad and the train crew were engaged in these switching operations, I would drop off the engine with a .22 rifle in my hand and disappear into the wilderness above the mines. I never quite knew what kind of game I was pursuing. The train crew would good-naturedly kid me about the buckskin I failed to bring in, but that didn't really matter. It is the joy and freedom of roaming those sun-drenched hills without a care in the world that I remember. I don't believe I could have shot with intent to kill any of God's gentle creatures, although a few lizards and bull snakes fell victim to my marksmanship. Mostly I was rewarded only by the sound of a shot ricocheting off a rock and the echo reverberating across the hills. Toward sundown I would hear the whistle from Dad's engine in prearranged tones and sequence telling me that the switching operations were drawing to a close and it was time to come back to the train.

On this particular day as I climbed up the gangway on Dad's engine the valleys were taking on the twilight gloom and misty chill of an early autumn evening. The mood of the scene changed. The mine buildings looked dingy and shabby. The cars rolling down from the tipple seemed ominous and foreboding. I remember shivering a little as I entered the warm cab of the engine and stood my rifle in the corner behind Dad's seatbox.

The switching process had proceeded to the point that the train of cars had been assembled and the air brake test was in process. In this procedure the engineman made a full application of the air brakes while the trainmen walked the length of the train and checked the brakes on each car. It would be foolish to descend that four percent grade without the assurance that the brakes on every car were working properly. Once the train had been inspected, the brakemen would release the few hand brakes that had been set to hold the cars. They would then signal the "highball" to the engineer who would whistle-off, and the train would proceed down the mountain.

On this day the head-end brakeman was a man named Speedy Martin. His Christian name was probably known only to the payroll department. Along the entire railroad he was known as “Speedy” because of the slowness of his movements. Tonight as he ambled along the train of cars toward the engine my dad became increasingly irritable. He threw open the cab window and urged Speedy into a faster gait by certain rude references to his agility and intelligence.

This action was totally out of character for my usually jovial father and prompted me to inquire, “What’s wrong, Dad?”

Closing his window and turning to the inside of the cab he said seriously, “Son, our ancestors spent too many generations in those dank dark holes known as coal mines. When the sun goes down in a coal camp I become very depressed and melancholy. I realize that except for a quirk of fate you and I could be down there now! When darkness falls in a coal camp I want to be rolling down the mountain towards God’s country!”

About that time he got the highball and whistled-off with two blasts. The cab was filled with the screech of hissing air as the brakes were released and the train lurched into motion downgrade and into the autumn twilight. As we slowly threaded the tortuous turns of the canyon I reflected on that quirk of fate that had brought my dad and me out of the pits. I have had occasion to reflect on it more soberly as the years unfolded the course of my life and that of my family. Somehow it causes me to think more kindly of my much-maligned grandfather, Dick the Devil, as he got off the steps of the mine office at Castle Gate those many years ago.

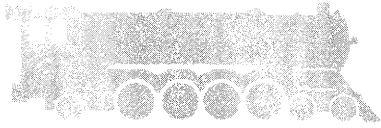
This history begins with my father’s account of growing up as an immigrant boy, first in the several rural locations of 1890s Utah where his father’s work as a section hand or boss took the family, and later as a streetwise newsboy observing life in Salt Lake City in the early years of this century. During this time the influence and pull of railroads remained strong, becoming the consuming interest of his life. He achieved his ambition and became first a fireman and then an engineer. The greater part of his book tells of life on the railroad: its hazards and adventures, the fascinating characters who lived it, its traditions and skills, and the changes technology brought to it during his lifetime. I am aware of no written work that captures as well the culture, atmosphere, and ambience of the high noon of steam railroading as I knew it.

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Publisher's Note

My *Life on Mountain Railroads* is both the memoir of one experienced engineer (an “old head” in the argot of the rails) and a rich primary source for the occupational folklore of railroad culture during the last days of steam. The story is largely written in the vernacular of that culture, and thus it contains much railroad jargon and many technical terms. In consultation with the editor, William R. Gould, we concluded that most of these are comprehensible in context. Here and there, definitions have been added for those that were not; these are at the first or another early appearance of the word or phrase. Entries for such definitions or explanations are highlighted in the index, which readers should consult if they do not understand specific terms. Although a reader can learn much about the operation of steam locomotives from this book, it is not meant to be a technical guide to running such engines, and thus some of the technical terminology may remain obscure or difficult even as defined.

We have, in addition to adding a few definitions and lightly editing the text, reorganized it into chapters that proceed in roughly chronological order. Otherwise, we have altered little and have instead preserved Gilbert Gould's writing with all its rich character. We hope the result will both entertain and inform while providing a unique glimpse of life on a steam engine.



Youth

I remember a little-used passing track at mile post 15. It meandered away from the mainstem of the Tintic branch of the Oregon Short Line (OSL) railroad to skirt the edge of a wheat field and further on it wound back to connect with the main again. Between the main and passing tracks, about halfway along, stood a very leaky old water tank where the engines of eastbound trains always came to a stop to replenish their water supply before tackling the rising grade that lifted sharply after leaving the tank. To the right of the passing track going east, a pump house labored throughout the day to keep the leaky old tank from going dry. To the left of the mainline stood a large red section house with a wooden platform leading from the front door to the rail's edge.

That's all there was at mile post 15 except a crossboard that proclaimed the place, "Cedar Fort." In order to see the town, you would have to direct your gaze up toward the foothills. That lush green spot against the mountain, two and a half miles away, was the town—Cedar Fort.

Once in a great while a resident or two of that community would find it necessary to come down to the section house, or station, as they called it, to flag a westbound passenger train in order to ride to the city around the mountain.

That section house, call it what you like, was the home of my parents and a half dozen of us kids. My dad was section boss at mile post 15. Follow the mainline east, up the grade and at mile post 21 you came to a junction town called Fairfield. It derived the appellation of junction from the fact that a mining company, high up in a canyon to the right, owned a railroad of their own. This railroad ran down to meet the Oregon Short