

August 4, 2025 at 11:59 PM CDT

The Roscoe Suggestion

All, today was a novel day. The first thing that I did when I rolled out of bed was to send out the remaining chapters of The Magic Couch. From what I understand every chapter reached everyone except for some issues experienced by all APT Group member Lee Roscoe.

The Roscoe Suggestion...

Lee, drawing on her considerable experience as a successful writer and author, suggested that it would be better for me to send out future chapters as PDF attachments. That's not a bad idea and I can do it. The only thing that I might have to consider is the size of any PDF that I send because I believe there is a limit in size where yahoo.com is concerned. Something else that I will have to do is make sure that I have a very clean manuscript to create the PDF. [Note: By clean, I mean an image that does not have all of my notes in the margins. Speaking of margins,, I prefer wide margins because it allows me to write my edits in them.]

The Rest Of The Day...

At about 7:20 AM I drove to Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin where Marquart Toyota is located. Purpose of the trip was an oil change and a tire rotation, plus cleaning out the air filter that conducts air to the major battery in order to cool it. Very important maintenance for the battery.

Marquart provides a very comfortable waiting room for customers. Coffee, cookies, hot chocolate, or soda. Customers sit around talking to each other. Those who are not in the mood to talk can find waiting rooms, also provided where everyone has an individual comfortable chair. These rooms are stocked with out-of-date magazines and enough electrical outlets for anyone to plug-in whatever device they choose. (The scene was considerably brightened up because one customer was accompanied by their pet, a Standard Poodle. I was reminded of how I used to bring FlowerBear with me while I waited for an oil change.)

Eavesdropping...

While getting some coffee I overheard a couple of guys, more or less my age, talking about finding a good roofer. I overheard a referral to a very competent roofer. A little while after the suggestion was made about particular roofer I got to talking with the fellow who was looking for roofer. I gave him the name of the fellow who did my roofing and siding. Then we got to talking...

I've Been Working on the Railroad...

For some reason, probably because I'm nosy, asked this guy what he did during his career. Some people might regard that question as prying, i.e., none of my business. However, this guy didn't feel that way. His answer was, "I was a locomotive Engineer for the Sioux Line." He captured my complete attention and interest. We sat down, with a couple cups of coffee, and he told me about his career for approximately an hour. I learned a lot.

He told me that he started with the Sioux Line in 1968. Couple of months after he started he was drafted, served, and returned to the railroad. They acknowledged his service by adding those years to his seniority. Then he told me about his first responsibility. He was a Brakeman.

Like anyone else who was given a set of trains as a kid (Lionel) I assumed that a Brakeman was responsible for slowing the train down, getting it to stop. I was way off base. It turns out that a Brakeman is responsible for knowing what trains are coming into the train yard, then sorting out the cars, based on contents and destination, to assemble a new train. Once that job is done the train is ready to go. (And all this time I thought the job involves stopping trains. Actually, it's just the opposite. The Brakeman is the person who gets them on their way.)

Then, I asked, "What other people are on the crew with you?"

He answered, "There would be the Conductor and me, the Engineer."

"Why would you need a Conductor on a freight train? There are no passengers, right?"

The answer surprised me. The Engineer said, "The responsibility of the Conductor is to know what is in every single car on the train because if there is any sort of a derailment or other accident, the emergency services need to know what a car contains so that they will handle it correctly. It can be anything from explosives, to corrosive chemicals, to whatever you might ship by train. In an emergency this is very important information."

As a follow-up, I asked "What are the responsibilities of the Engineer?"

I learned that it involves a lot more than watching the track and tooting the horn for the kids at the side of the railroad track waving to the train. He said, "The Engineer is responsible for every mechanical element of the train from the locomotive, to the last car on the train. This includes every detail.

"Also, the Engineer must to know the route because the levels will vary. You have different grades, many curves, weather that can affect you, etc." It became evident to me that the Engineer is not just there for the ride.

The infrastructure of American railroads is a great concern to this retired Locomotive Engineer. He pointed out that the Japanese and several European countries have done a good job with their train service, both freight and passenger. He could not see a reason why we have not invested similarly.

As for passenger service, he is not a fan of Amtrak. He told me that it would not be his choice for travel. And I could tell that he regretted this because he had been in the business when it was still fun to go by train, back in the 1970s.

My Perspective Shift...

I am certain that the next time I see the gates are down at the railroad crossing on the road that I'm using, I will see the train a bit differently. I don't think I'll be quite as annoyed by the delay. Instead, I'll be thinking about all the work that went into putting that train together by the Brakeman, then, the Conductor who knows what each car contains, and, finally, the Locomotive Engineer, who makes sure that it reaches its destination safely.

First yawn...

Until tomorrow...

Ken