

Editor's Note

Happy New Year! In 2013 the theme of the feature articles and Classroom Activities is transportation in the USA. In each issue we will focus on a different mode of transport, and we begin with trains.

In the United States, trains are popular toys (for people of all ages); they are the subject of countless books and songs and, of course, are an important means of getting people and goods from one place to another all across the country.

Trains are in my blood, as they say. My paternal grandfather worked on the railroad most of his life. For much of the time, he was a mechanic in the roundhouse, maintaining steam locomotives for the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad, which operated in the midwestern and mountain states. (The railroad had a slogan, “Everywhere West,” that was painted on many of its locomotives.)

My grandparents lived in the small town of Edgemont, South Dakota, in a house near the railroad tracks. When I visited my grandparents, I liked to lie awake at night listening to the whistles of the passing trains and the sound of boxcars clattering along the rails. Sometimes when my grandfather drove my siblings and me through town, he'd have to stop the car at a railroad crossing to let a train pass. When that happened, he encouraged us to count the cars of the train, which often numbered over 100 (and we were quite impressed by that).

When my grandfather was 57, he got laid off because at that time trains had diesel engines, which required much less attention from mechanics than steam engines had. But that was not the end of my grandfather's work with trains. He got a job working on the 1880 Train run by the Black Hills Central Railroad. This train hauls people—mostly tourists—between Hill City and Keystone, South Dakota. As a child, I rode on this train with a large contingent of relatives (and there's a home movie to prove it).

Last summer my sister and I and five cousins returned to our past (so to speak) and took a ride on the 1880 Train. The train's route through the Black Hills with its views of rocky slopes and large stands of ponderosa pines brought back memories of our childhood. And the clouds of steam from the smokestack and the blasts of the train whistle echoed back to earlier days of railroads.

Whatever your experience of trains might be, we hope you will learn something new about them as you read this issue. *All aboard!*



1880 Train in the Black Hills, South Dakota