

Sometimes Life Is Like a Run-Away Train

By Bud Moellinger 2008

It was late afternoon of a very pleasant day. I was cooking a meal, in preparation for guests that were coming for supper. The Auxvasse Creek Indian Fellowship was meeting at our place. I like to cook. I like to have guests. Usually I cook for myself and Sheri, and sometimes when he is home from school, Jason. These meals are pretty simple, just two or three people. So, if there is a big group coming, it is a little more stressful to cook, but I still enjoy it. I don't use recipes. I just try to figure out how stuff I have liked would be prepared. Sometimes I cook something really good, and then can't duplicate it again, because there is no recipe.

On this particular afternoon the stress factor was increased, because I was cooking on a train that was pulled by an old wood fired steam locomotive. I was the driver.

Since the train ran on steel tracks, the only thing the driver really needed to do, was keep the fire-box full of wood, the fire burning at the correct rate, to keep the heat to the boiler steady, and the speed of the locomotive constant. That kept the train going down the tracks, which at the time seemed the only important thing to me. That, and making sure that the meal was ready for when the guests arrived.

I would be in the kitchen, overseeing the food cooking on the stove, while cutting up garden vegetables for a salad. When doing something like getting another vegetable out of the refrigerator, I would make a quick dash into the locomotive cab, check the fire, maybe chuck in some more wood, and give the gauges a quick glance to ensure that the steam pressure was in the proper place, and the speed of the train was pegged right where I wanted it.

All of this OK, I would rush back to the kitchen, and work on the meal preparation. Dinner was getting pretty close to being done. I usually like to fix stuff that can cook a while, and not overcook. Then the stuff can be finishing up cooking while the guests arrive with their food, and the buffet set up, and we all eat.

About the time everything was coming together real good, and I was just going to be waiting for guests to arrive the thought came to me, "Here I am speeding down the railroad tracks with my dinner. Where are the guests supposed to arrive to?"

Wow, had I screwed up! The guests were going to arrive at my house very soon, and I really didn't even know where I was! What was I thinking? Where am I?

I quickly ran into the locomotive cab and looked ahead along the track that the train was speeding down. I lowered the steam pressure to slow the train. I hit the whistle, to blow off more steam to further slow the train, as I watched the rails ahead for any sign of where I was.

It appeared that I was about halfway around an hour long loop of track that would return

the train home. It made no difference now if I were to back up to home, or continue straight ahead to home. Stopping and backing up the train would probably take more time, so I closed the valve, quit blowing the whistle, and allowed the steam pressure to build up to add more speed to the train. I opened the fire-box and stacked in more wood, then opened up the dampers to get the fire burning hotter. Soon we were roaring down the track.

I knew dinner was OK without my attention now, so I stayed in the cab, to nurse every bit of speed that I could out of the old locomotive. Looking ahead I could see that the track was not in too good of condition. Weeds and small saplings had taken over the railroad right of way. This was slowing the train, and I feared, might soon de-rail the locomotive. As I slowed down the pace of the locomotive, the four wheels that drove the locomotive on each side broke away from the frame. Then they opened up and became four horses that were still running along side, but were bearing away from the locomotive, and all too soon would leave it and the train stranded. I reached down and picked up the front trailer wheels, you know the smaller wheels that are in front of the big drive wheels, and threw them in front of the horses in an attempt to trip them up and stop them, or at least get them back onto the locomotive to get the train home. This worked! The lead horse hit the obstruction, went down on his knees, tucked his head down and rolled! He became a wheel again. Like dominos the other horses followed suit and changed back into wheels. By chucking pieces of fire wood in front of them, I directed the wheels back towards the locomotive and we were on the way again. But then the same thing happened to the other side! The same trick worked on that side, and we were again under way.

Real close, the house in site now, another obstruction appeared ahead. An old western looking outlaw type person in a long duster and dark hat was standing by the tracks, holding a rectangle shaped metallic object in his arms that I knew was a bomb. Both sets of drive wheels on either side broke off again together. The wheels became horses, spooked by the outlaw guy, and ran off into the pasture. The train coasted in to a stop just beside the house and became the front porch. Robert Francis in his “dry-as-a-bone” duster and leather hat stepped up on the porch and handed me a foil covered cake tin, saying, “Here’s a cherry cobbler that Janet sent along”. The rest of the guests were driving up and parking in the yard. We set up a huge buffet. Seeing the guests all lined up and filling their plates, I grabbed a plate and filled it up with delicious food. I found a place to sit down, but before I could raise one forkful of food to my mouth, I woke up.

What a dream! I went downstairs, made a few notes about the dream, so I wouldn’t forget any of the details, and sat for a while thinking about what had just happened.

I once heard a poem that went something like this;

It’s not my job to drive the train,
Nor even ring the bell.
But let the damn thing jump the track,
And see who catches Hell.

There are a lot of songs about trains too. Just a while ago Josh Turner had a big hit called Long Black Train. Here's a verse from it;

There's a long black train, coming down the line,
Feeding off the souls that are lost and crying.
Rails of sin, only evil remains,
Watch out brother for that long black train.

I wondered how much time we spend going through life, speeding down the track, just trying to get somewhere in a hurry. Do we really know where we are going? Is the destination important, or is just the fact that we are getting there fast important? Are we as the Three Stooges might say, "Getting Nowhere, Fast"?

Do we feel at times like the poem, "It's not my job to drive the train, but if something goes wrong, I will be the one in trouble?"

People have said that life can become like a run-a-way train, but my train was not really a run-away, I was in control, sort of, but I just did not realize where I was going, or had not taken the time to decide where I was going.

Sometimes it can be good to just get going. It can be fun. Just leave for a journey, with no particular destination in mind. Just see what happens and where you end up. Sometimes that is fun. Sometimes that can lead you to wonderful places that you never would have thought of making a special trip to. Sometimes it can lead to not so nice places. Sometimes you could be off on a train and your guests could be showing up, and there you ain't.

There are all kinds of different Religions, and ways of Spirituality in this world. Some are similar, some are vastly different. But common to all, is an order or a recipe or some rules and regulations. Churches have Orders of Worship. Ceremonies have specific parts. You have to have the First Round in a Sweat before you can have the others. You can't have the Fourth Round First.

When cooking, it is good to have and follow a recipe. You can't grease the pan after the food is cooked. Or yeah you can, but the results would be better if you do things in the proper order.

However, it is also good to not get bogged down in the structure. Maybe you are following a recipe and you think to add a little something extra. The dish you are preparing remains the same dish, but now it is more yours. You have made it unique to you.

So, whatever ways you follow, it is good to have some structure to them. It is good to know the proper way the Ceremonies go. It is good to think about and study the ways of Worship and the ways of Ceremony. To do so we can study the Bible, we can listen to

the old stories of our cultural traditions, and we can listen to the Elders. That way we can be assured that in our Spiritual path we are getting somewhere, rather than nowhere, fast. But even if we do begin on the path to nowhere, fast, Creator can still get us home. Might be that an old western looking outlaw type, might signal us in. We just need to be watchful and quiet, so we can hear Creator's instructions, and a way will be provided.