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FAST TRAINS

America's High Speed Future

by

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Foreword

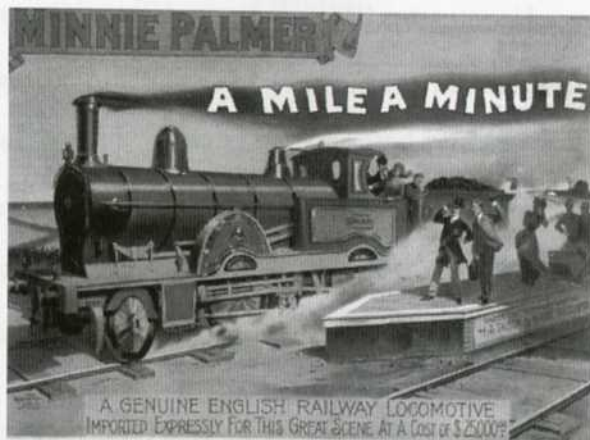
My Tales of Trains

"We must always have old memories and young hopes."

—Arsene Houssa

When Emy Louie first approached me and asked if I would be interested in collaborating on this book, my response was very visceral and immediate: fast trains, any trains—yes!

Trains have played a major role in my family history and in my own life, so if my contribution to this book can help advance the dialogue that leads to widespread support for a vigorous high-speed rail system in this country, I will feel that my life and family history have been part of an amazing tale of progress. My story is not that unique, however. Many Americans will surely have similar stories of how trains and rail travel have touched them and



their family. In fact, the story of America's expansion and development is so dependent on trains (see chapter 2), it is safe to say that the story of trains is an American story and trains and train travel are as American as baseball and apple pie.

It was long ago when my grandfather Bill Nagle, son of Irish immigrants, was hired as a new member of a crew for the Missouri Pacific Railroad. Actually, Bill's

surname was Nangle, but when his first paycheck from Missouri Pacific mistakenly spelled his name Nagle, he decided then and there to let the name change stay. The railroad job held considerable excitement for this young man. I've read that duties as a brakeman often required running across the tops of moving rail cars! Bill met my grandmother, Agnes Johnston, daughter of

an Austrian indentured servant, married her, and stayed as a Kansas railroader.

Agnes' family homesteaded land in a sod house in pioneer Kansas in exchange for working the land. The family parlayed

the homestead for farmland near the town of Hoisington, Kansas. This land came with mineral rights and eventually produced an oil well and provided a certain degree of prosperity. With Bill working on the Missouri Pacific



they settled in Hoisington. It was a town built around the rail industry and was called back in those days a "railroad town." Hoisington was a nice place with a charming little main street that headlined a bustling community of warm and friendly Kansans during its heyday.

Grandmother's new home became known as the go-to place for a hot meal for anyone who jumped off the train and would traverse the

fields to her house and knock at her back door for warmth and sustenance. They were the hobos who rode the rails in the years before and during the Great Depression. Later in life, Grandmother Agnes heard Jack Dempsey on a radio program recalling a red-headed girl from a Kansas wheat farm feeding him a nice meal during the lean times before he became the famous boxing champion of the world. Agnes wrote to him saying she thought she was



that girl and he wrote back a nice thank you letter that she kept, and which we still have.

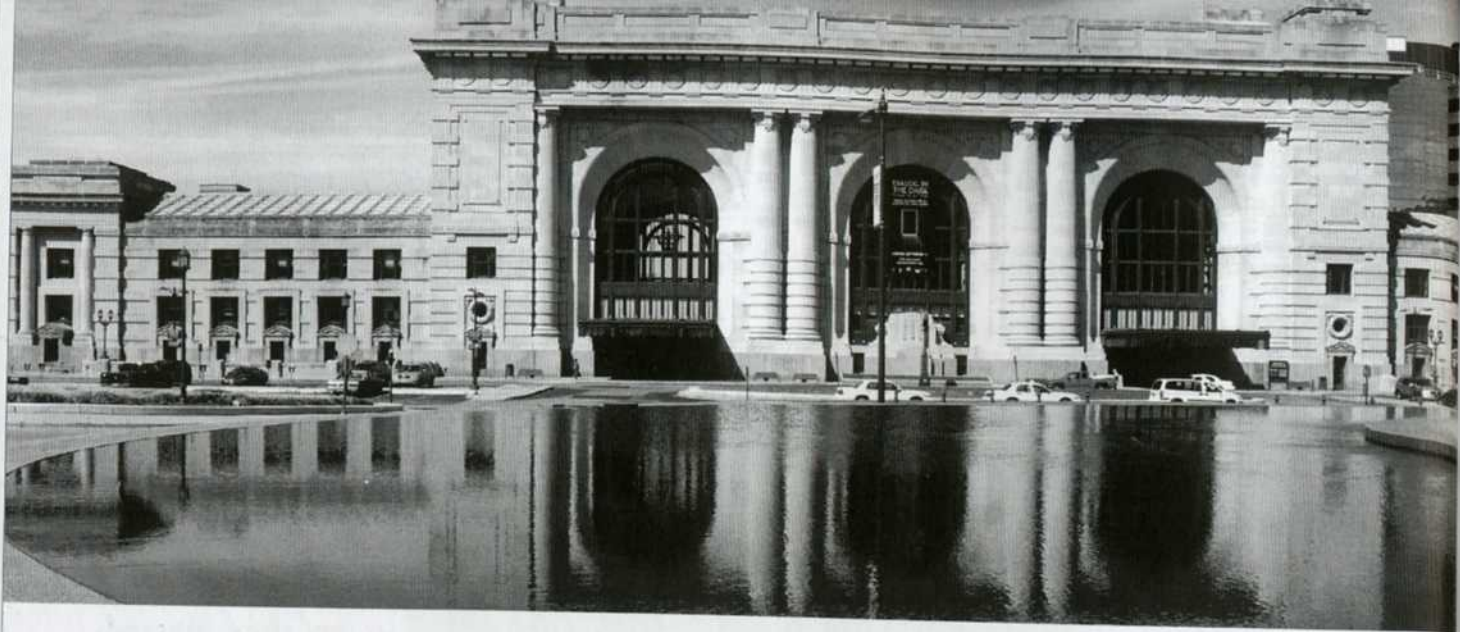
When I would visit my Grandma and Grandpa's Hoisington home I was soothed by the sound of trains traversing the alleyway behind their house. Sometimes I would plant myself in the grass near to the tracks to watch the freight trains pass in my ongoing quest

to see a "hobo." To me they were mythical heroes, who I had overheard the adults in my family say would jump on and off unoccupied or empty train cars as they sped along. I paid

particular attention to the empty train cars with the double-wide doors flung open so I could look in as they passed my vantage point. Hour upon hour of hobo watching and hunting would pass, and I never did spot one. I have to confess that now, as a 58-year-old woman;

my eyes still linger on the occasional train—gazing into the passing rail cars just in case my luck may have suddenly changed after all these years.

I grew up in a suburb of Kansas City, where one architecturally striking building downtown was Union Station. It became a regular and favorite destination for me as it



was the point of arrival for the train my dear Grandma Agnes Nagle, then widowed, who rode from Hoisington, Kansas to visit our family. I would wait expectantly with my numerous siblings, our eyes riveted on the terminal gates for the arrival of this strong-willed, wonderful lady. Some thirty years later, my daily arrival on the Metro North commuter rail line into New York City's Grand Central Station from my home in Fairfield, Connecticut, conjured up memories of the not quite as grand, but still magnificent Union Station in Kansas City.

My advertising career demanded that I work and travel extensively by plane (over 100,000 miles per year at least). I also spent a good

deal of time on the highways in, out, and around New York City. Alternatives? When a train was available, for trips to Washington, D.C. for example, I would try to take it.

Many Americans share this dilemma. If trains, particularly fast trains, are available, we will use them. If not, then we will use other modes of transportation that are more resource intensive and more polluting. But currently, few Americans have fast trains as an option. This is how and why I became such a fervent proponent of High-Speed Rail and am hoping for a future that includes it.

Co-author, Nancy Nagle Bolts

Above: Kansas City's Union Station
At right; Grand Central Terminal in New York City