Backtrackin'

“Climb aboard” as readers recall the golden age of rail transportation.

All Alone!

I WAS 13 in 1932 and my father, owner of a construction business in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, had survived the first few years of the Great Depression. But as the business slowed, Dad’s company fell into debt and failed. He and my older sister, Martha, drove to Florida and moved in with Mother’s brother and his family.

Mom and I sold our home and furnishings and paid off what debts we could before joining them in Florida

I spent most of my time on the rear deck of the train’s observation car.

When we pulled into St. Louis, I decided I had better check on Mother and, as I walked through the car, I discovered it was empty and sitting by itself on the tracks.

I tried not to panic, got off and was walking toward the station when I saw some cars and an engine backing up the track toward me.

As soon as the cars were coupled to the one I had been on, I scampered through several cars before finding my mother calmly reading a magazine.

The train crew was just adding a dining car, but it was certainly a relief to sit next to my dear mom.

We eventually arrived in Florida and later moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, where Dad found work. We rented a house, and my uncle

and his family and my grandmother moved in with us.

Those indeed were hard times, but we survived and learned the meaning of the love of God and family, hard work, honesty and perseverance.

—Bert Reynolds, Brownsburg, Indiana

Boss Was Smoking Mad

IN THE EARLY 1940s, nothing caught a kid's attention faster than trains and planes. When I graduated from a Chicago high school, in 1942, I landed a job as messenger and office boy in the master mechanic's office with the Chicago & North Western Railway Company.

Our office was over the railroad tracks on the second floor of a small, smoke-stained brick building at the north end of the coach yards, next to the tracks and roundhouse.

One very hot summer afternoon, dense smoke began pouring from the office of our boss, master mechanic Elmer Holmquist.

He came running through the smoke and charged across the outer office and out the door.

Some thoughtless engineer had parked his steam locomotive with the smokestack directly under his boss' window and the locomotive unattended.

Mr. Holmquist climbed into the cab and drove it out into the yards. When he came back into the office, he was still fuming. Soon, the guilty engineer was ushered in and the door closed.

We couldn't hear the words, but they were heated. The luckless train driver left white-faced and departed without a word.

After that, no train crew ever parked a puffer anywhere near the boss' window. —LeRoy Knekow, Richmond, Texas