

# Logging was early lure to hobby

*Allen Gross earns MMR #238*

The ubiquitous Lionel Scout arrived Christmas morning, 1951. Unfortunately, my idea of good times was to run full speed off the end of track and watch our dog chase it under the couch. Father decided it needed protection, so I was ostracized. Interest waned and it was put away — a stellar beginning.

In 1959 a friend of a friend gave up on his HO layout and gave us kids the leavings, including old railroad magazines. Hooked by an article on rebuilding a Tyco “shifter” into a detailed industrial engine I was quickly taught the first law of detailing — the cost of parts far exceeds the cost of the thing being detailed! At 16, I began University and the trains went away, save the Tyco and three old ore cars. Years passed and the train “collection” grew by a piece or two acquired by accident, or perhaps cruel fate.

Suddenly, I had graduated and the esoteric lure of railroad logging equipment emerged. The Snake River Timber Company was born and collecting logging locomotives became a passion. A small home shelf layout (shared by two small dogs, a large skunk and two rats Orville and Wilbur, the Rat Brothers) was followed by acceptance, (despite the skunk) into the Southern Arizona Society of Model Engineers, a fine club. I learned from the experts of the time how to do research, detail and construction. I also discovered the NMRA and the Contest Room.

Life in railroading became the contest circuit. I left the club, let the home layout go to seed (Orville and Wilbur had the run of the train room and had eaten most of the scenery) and concentrated on contest model building.

In due time I moved to a new job and a new railroading environment. I discovered that while I still loved the Contest Room, I had come to enjoy the social aspect and general Camaraderie (i.e., of model railroading). I had made good friends at the club, and I was now making new acquaintances to my benefit. The Achievement Program worked its way into my schedule. I met several Gold Award winners and interest accelerated. At the same time, it was back to school for a graduate degree. The trains held their own against the forces of life, including three years of back and forth to the middle east. The achievement certificates slowly accumulated. Then one

evening, I remembered there was a Lionel set from 1951 sequestered in a box somewhere! Perhaps I should find it and see what was left? Today, half of the train room, and once a year at Christmas the Living Room, is early Lionel. In fact, my Electrical certificate was done with three rail. Diversity is one of the joys of Model Railroading. I hold certificates for: Master Builder - Motive Power, Master Builder - Cars, Master Builder - Structures (all great fun), Prototype Modeler (I urge everyone to look closely at this category — it is very rewarding), Model Railroad Engineer - Electrical (3-rail is not as easy to figure out as you might think), Association Volunteer (this should be a mandatory certificate) and Model Railroad Author (more difficult).

Railroading now fits between my environmental research and land use company and other competing interests such as old cars and my very understanding family, but still dominates all when contest time comes around. If I were to distill my experience in railroading and the Achievement Program, it would be the broad spectrum of people I have met, especially those with whom I have maintained long and valuable friendships. The kind words, examples and freely given assistance of my fellows, especially LeRoy Thompson, MMR 69, and the opportunities to share information as Division Contest Chair and clinician at Division and Region meets have been most satisfying. Also, I have learned to keep the pet rats out of the train room.

Model railroading can become clandestine and obsessive, but you remain all the poorer if you cannot recognize the great value, influence and effect of your contemporaries. The AP is an extension of this recognition. If we were meant to be curmudgeonly, we would all have been born with basements!•

