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MMR GROUP: All MMRs are invited to work with other MMRs by contacting Rick Shoup, MMR, at ricshoup@verizon.net. If you have questions about the AP program or requirements, start with your local or Region AP manager. If you still have questions, contact Frank Koch at fjkoch@hotmail.com. If you prefer to write, contact Frank at 4769 Silverwood Dr., Batavia, OH 45103.
January 2011

Al Crisp Earns MMR # 430

My fascination with trains (and all things in motion) began long before model trains came to our family; it began with Canadian Pacific Railway passenger Train 706 from Owen Sound to Toronto Union Station, to be exact. In the 1950s, I grew up in a CPR family with the perk of travel pass for all passenger service (except Montreal commuters), a real treat for a youngster in those days.

I have etched in my mind the sounds, smells, and motion of the ride behind G-class steam power with my mom from the suburban Islington station in west Toronto. We would arrive at Union Station about 11.45AM, proceed through the Grand Hall, and then down into the tunnel to the Royal York Hotel to visit with my dad. He would come out from the Princess Lounge — a prime watering hole for Canadian business types in the '50s — dressed in his smart red and green uniform and chat with us before his full shift started. Mom and I would then go shopping until return train time.

A few years later, the normal model train process began when American Flyer arrived at No. 11 Hillcroft Drive in Etobicoke. This was rapidly exchanged for HO when Father saw the potential for more trains in the available space in our basement. The original equipment, a Varney dockside, an Akane 2-8-0, and some Roundhouse freight cars, reside in a display case in the layout room to this day.

In the late 1950s, I received a Canadian Tire three-speed bicycle for a birthday present, which I promptly pressed into service to get me to the Islington station for train watching. Sadly, I did not have my own camera then; so many good shots were missed! This was the end of CPR steam and the time of the arrival of maroon and grey diesels in southern Ontario. Luckily, other older railfans took some shots in this area. I have since found some prints and drawings of the Islington station — a scratchbuilt model of Islington station is on my home layout as a result. It is the first thing one will see entering the layout.

My scratchbuilding started by the time I was 13, working in cardboard, wood, and some metals. Articles in Model Railroader by Jack Work and Gib Kennedy have had a life-long influence on my modeling style and tastes. The large 1950s CPR layout I have built was handled using Jack Work’s switch article and scenery techniques. I have built more than 100 switches in Jack Work’s style and some are 30 years young and have never broken down.

From Jack’s article on the little Otis ore car, I started my work to get the car builders certificate. His CPR caboose article was the inspiration for a prize-winning van that helped toward the same end. From Gib Kennedy’s articles, I built a wood CPR combine that scored well in a contest at a British NMRA Region Convention.

At present, my modeling interests are still centered on the CPR in northern Ontario, circa 1958. I decided many years ago that I wanted only to build one large layout that would keep me and some friends busy for many years to come, hence
the handlaid track and scratchbuilt cars and buildings. In addition, most things on the roster and layout have undergone some kitbashing or painting and weathering. I was lucky in that my wife gave me the run of nearly the entire basement from the start. Over the years, many people, starting with my late father, have been a great help with construction and operation of the Great White North Division. The layout takes up most of a 24x54-foot room, the scenery is 95 percent done with still plenty of building and upgrades to do in my retirement. At present, we operate every few weeks with about a dozen crewmembers. Recently, a small English layout was started in a corner for my wife, Christine, to operate our growing collection of GWR locomotives and rolling stock obtained from our trips to the United Kingdom and gifts from friends.

My interest in the Achievement Program began in the 1990s after I won some model contests in rolling stock and I was told I had received enough points for a Volunteer Certificate from various clinics and other activities in the Niagara and British Regions. Sadly, during this period, a double disaster struck my personal life. First, I was involved in a head-on collision in my big truck, and then while I was home waiting for the insurance to be settled, my father fell off a ladder at my parent’s winter retreat in Florida and nearly died after suffering a major head injury. In the aftermath of these events, I went to work on getting five AP certificates. I credit this task with helping me keep focused and getting through this very tough time in my life. At present, the NMRA has seen fit to award me with Master Builder Cars, Scenery, Author, Civil, Electrical, Volunteer, Chief Dispatcher, and at long last Master Model Railroader.

I am now semi-retired from 42 years of long haul trucking in Canada and the United States. I now stay close to home driving dump trucks and floats during the construction season. This leaves plenty of model time in the winter! Yes, I do miss the benefit of seeing much in the way of rail interest on my travels. I spent most of my trucking career in hauling for heavy industry — trains are never far away because one is either in competition or consort. A lot of interesting train scenes were on view to a trucker railfan that the average modeler would rarely, if ever, see. Industrial railroad-ing is fascinating, and there is a prototype for almost everything hidden in a steel mill somewhere. Plenty of my modeling ideas have been gained from visiting these sites and taking pictures. Right now, I am building a paper mill complex and mine site based on these experiences of the last 40 years.

Aside from work and play on the two home layouts, I also spend time as a part-time member of the York Model Rail Club in Toronto. Trips to other clubs and layouts for our operating crew are also something I like to set up once in a while. I am one of the regular grunts at the travelling road show called the "Craftsmen’s Corner." This is a display of modeling talent and clinics the members of the Niagara Frontier Region put on at various shows around Ontario. In 2007, while attending the Detroit NMRA Convention, I met the organizers of Trainfest, one of the largest annual North American Train Shows and they invited Craftsman's Corner to be part of the event held in Milwaukee in mid-November. We have now participated in the show for two years (2008 and 2009). I enjoy taking on the task of organizing our annual trip of the Craftsman Corner to this great event. Also on my agenda for the past five years is to help set up a home and club layout tour for the first Sunday in October. In 2009, we managed 18 layouts, starting about 50 miles north of Toronto and working north from there. This year, we are looking forward to being a sanctioned event with the NFR-NMRA.

For the past 30 years, I have resided 125 miles north of Toronto in the village of Severn Bridge, Ontario, with my long-time wife and partner, Christine. The work on the Great White North will continue for the foreseeable future, and fellow modelers are always welcome to our sessions. On a personal note, we share our life with four rescued basset hounds; Jamie, Mingus, Daisy, and Roxy, plus a few likewise rescued cats.