For as long as I can remember, I have had a fascination with railroads. I was into Thomas the Tank Engine, but I loved real trains more. I wanted to become a locomotive engineer when I got older. I always was able to see myself inside the cab of a diesel, blowing the horn for the crossings. My very first memory of a train was in Bethpage. We were waiting at the crossing and a freight consisting of an F-Unit (One type of locomotive that is infamous for replacing the steam locomotive) and a GP38 (Once a locomotive on the LIRR in the 1990’s) and a bunch of boxcars going by.

After that I loved trains. I had model trains, but most of them were destroyed because I was little. By the time I was in Kindergarten, I knew about the rivalry between the Pennsylvania and the New York Central Railroads, but I did not know what had happened to them. I also knew how famous the Santa Fe Railroad was and their most famous train, The Super Chief. By 5th grade, I knew Locomotive types such as the locomotives on the Long Island in the ‘90’s, like the GP38 and the MP15. I knew about the Southern Pacific Railroad and what had happened to them (Merged with the Union Pacific in 1996). I also knew what had happened to the Santa Fe, Burlington Northern, (Merged together in 1995) Chicago & North Western (Merged with the UP in 1995), Great Northern, Northern Pacific and the Burlington Route (Merged together in 1969 to create the Burlington Northern). In 7th Grade, I saw my first magazine from the 1960’s. After that, I started collecting them. I had Trains, Railroad, Railfan, Railroad Classics, Classic Trains, and a few others, and I had over 2,000 individual magazines by the time I was in 10th grade. What I found most interesting was the ideas of the time and the experiments that went on. As a result of me collecting the magazines, my knowledge of the Railroads increased tremendously. By 9th grade, I knew the fate of the Pennsylvania, New York Central, and New Haven Railroads. I knew about the story of the Penn Central and the aftermath of that disaster, I knew about the 7 Major Railroads left in North America, I knew about the New York and Atlantic, and why it was formed, I knew about the ICC and the FRA as well. Like I said, the amount of knowledge that I gained per year is astonishing to me now that I think about it. In 10th grade, for the first time, I became a member of the National Railroad Historical Society. I made many friends there; Elliot (also mentioned in the Pittsburgh trip) and a kid named John Groki are a few examples. John was the greatest story teller that I knew. He had a whole bunch of stories that are not very appropriate for this book. I met the representative for the Oyster Bay Railroad Museum. When I went to Oyster Bay for the first time, they were polishing Drive Rods for Locomotive Number 35. Locomotive 35 was owned by Nassau County, but they keep it in the Railroad Museum in Oyster Bay. They were working on restoring the locomotive to operating condition. There was a little joke with the museum members that went “By the time my grandkids are dead, it still won’t be running.” Anyway, the people there were really cool. There was Gary, who told everyone what to do. There was Steve, who was second in command. There was Wayne, who basically was the Comedian of the group. When a few of the other volunteers started talking about Amtrak, Wayne responded by saying with a straight face “I took a square shit yesterday.” Everyone was quiet after that. The only sound that was heard was me laughing really hard. Another day, a couple of chickens came into the museum and walked around. Wayne saw this, and for the rest of the day would walk around going “Buck buck buck buck buck” and we could hear him throughout the museum. And then, there was what Wayne calls the “Cranky old goat” Leon. Whenever I would screw around, Leon would always yell at me and call me something like “Shit bird.” Also at Oyster Bay, I met Ronnie. Ronnie was a crazy, but smart guy. There were many adventures that I went on with him. The Pittsburgh trip mentioned later would be one of them. Also, I would be rebuilding his layout from scratch.

When I was in 11th grade, I learned how to build and rebuild model locomotives. When I was 5, I could build boxcars, but not locomotives. There was no one in my school that knew as much as I did about railroad history. One year (I think it was 8th grade) the teacher let me teach about the Transcontinental Railroad for a day. There was actually one kid who dared to challenge me, and the things that I knew about the railroads when I was teaching the class. He tried to correct me by saying that the original route through Promontory Point was never bypassed by a route across the Great Salt Lake. I severely schooled him and everyone called him retarded after that move. In High school, He also tried to claim that the railroad used a locomotive that wasn’t even real in the first place. He said that “The Long Island Railroad used W20’s and that I am stupid because there is no such thing as a GP38-2.” I said to him “Go find a picture of this “W’ Whatever you called it and tell me when you find it and show me the picture.” The next day I brought in a Magazine and he brought a picture. He ended up bringing a picture of a GP38 and wrote W10 on it. I showed him the exact same picture he brought but with an official caption on it saying “LIRR GP38-2 through Bethpage…” and everyone laughed at him. Also in High School, when I started making friends, they found it “Nerdy” that I liked trains. For 10th grade, I wore my new shirts with pictures of Railroads, and trains on them. When I started driving, I would go out to watch trains at a place called Coastal Distribution. They received construction debris, and the NY&A would come and pick up cars and bring them west. Anyway, I’m not too sure what it is about railroads that I like so much. Maybe it’s just watching the massive freight trains go by, shaking the earth with every joint the wheels hit, and the loud horn. Maybe it’s the history of the railroad industry from the 1950’s to the 1990’s, all the companies whose names have been forgotten by time. Or maybe, it’s just all the legends and knowledge that could be collected by studying such a fascinating industry. Many people say that what I study is useless. Who cares that Penn Central was created by 2 arch rivals for over 100 years? Who cares that they caused the biggest bankruptcy in American industry up to that time? Who cares that the Santa Fe was a wonderful company? To me, someone has to remember this stuff, it cannot ever be forgotten, because if it is, than what will the point of documenting it be? I have taught my friends that have no interest in railroads, more than they think I have (In my opinion). I feel have taught them to be accepting of people who have different interests than they do. I think have taught them that there is much more to Railroads than just trains and tracks, but there are people that operate and maintain the machines that run a railroad. I feel that I have taught them that if you have a big enough dream, if you really want to do or learn something in life, go do it. My dream was to be a locomotive engineer. Ever since I can remember, whenever people asked me, “What do you want to do when you get older?” I would look at them and say in a serious tone “I want to work for the railroad as a locomotive engineer.” Many people have laughed at me for saying such a thing. Thinking that either that’s a ridiculous job that gets no pay, or just thinking that it’s just a “Stupid” dream. A few people even call my interest “Nerdy” or “Annoying”. There once was a time that you could say that and people would admire you. Kids dreamed of working for the railroad. Those days are long gone though. They say that I was born in the wrong time period, and I agree 100% with that statement.