

## THE TRAIN TO NEW ORLEANS

By John F. Hall

The Kentucky writer, Jesse Stuart wrote 460 short stories. The more I read about the man, the more I realized that we have a lot in common. The main difference is that our compulsion to write short stories takes a different road. Jesse's stories are mostly fiction. They are great figments of his imagination. All of my short stories are non-fiction. They are born from my experiences and my observations. This story is about a traffic accident that I investigated in 1977. It is also about a train and the trips that I took, with my wife, Paula on that train.

In 1977, I was a Kentucky State Trooper assigned to work the four Kentucky counties of Ballard, Carlisle, Hickman and Fulton. These four counties have a shore line along the Mississippi River. Early one dark morning, around 3:00 am, I was patrolling Highway 51. I watched as the City of New Orleans Amtrak passenger train, on its daily run from Chicago, came through the city of Fulton, Kentucky. Fulton is an Amtrak intercity train station. It is the only train station in the four river counties. The train station is located near the Purchase Parkway and Highway 51. I never observed anyone on the station's loading platform or anyone inside the station. I did observe several vehicles parked in the station's fenced-in parking area. My first impression was that the station had permanently closed.



I later learned that the station is a flag stop on the City of New Orleans train route. It only stops when passengers have tickets to and from the train station. It has an enclosed waiting area with no WiFi. The loading platform is accessible from the parking area. It has no ticket agent and it provides no assistance to the rail travelers. My patrol route would take me into the city of Fulton which is a twin city to South Fulton, Tennessee. The two towns are separated by a street that runs through both towns. I would make the U-turn on State Line Street in South Fulton, Tennessee, travel 20 feet, and be back in Fulton, Kentucky.

I never stayed more than a few minutes in Fulton, Kentucky. It was too far from Ballard County. I always tried to position myself around Arlington, Kentucky on Highway 51. That town is near the Carlisle/Hickman county line. About the time I reached Arlington, I received a dispatch from State Police Post 1, about a traffic accident with injuries south of Bardwell on Highway 51. I turned on my police emergency equipment and proceeded north on Highway 51. I arrived on the scene and noticed several cars with their emergency flashers on. At that location, the shoulder of the road drops off sharply. It was a very dark night with no moon light. I asked if anyone witnessed the accident? One man spoke up and said that he saw motorcycle coming his way. He said for some unknown reason, it just ran off the road.

I shined my flashlight down the shoulder of the road. I observed a wrecked motorcycle smashed against a large tree. Two people were laying on the ground and not moving. The Carlisle County Sheriff, when I was first assigned to Carlisle County, loaned me one if

his department's hand-held radios. At that time in history, the Kentucky State Police did not issue hand-held radios to its Troopers. I called the Sheriff's dispatcher and told her to contact the funeral home to send their hearse to the accident scene. In 1977, the town of Bardwell had a one-man police department. The town had no EMTs, no ambulance service, no hospital, or even a First Aid Station.

I slowly walked down the steep shoulder of the road. My flashlight provided the only light that night. I went to the first person. It was a man and I checked for a pulse. He had none. I shined the light on his face and I noticed the skin behind his ear. It was "Battle Blue" that indicated a basilar skull fracture. It appeared that his neck was broken and he was not breathing. I suspected that he fell asleep and ran off the road. He apparently died after hitting the tree. He may not have known that he died in a sparsely populated county, in what I call the middle of no-where. I turned my attention to the other person on the ground.

That person was a woman. I shined the light on her legs. She had a bad compound fracture of one leg. She was bloody and bruised and in bad shape. She regained consciousness. I was concerned that she might go into shock and die. I told her not to move. She kept asking about the man. To keep her calm, I told her that he was unconscious. She was a total stranger to me. I showed her some kindness and compassion that dark, cold night. She told me her name was Rhonda. I'm bad about remembering names. The reason I remember her name is that the Beach Boys had a number one hit in 1965 titled "Help Me Rhonda." I held her hand until the hearse arrived. The two employees from the funeral home had no medical experience or training. Their small first aid kit was almost useless. Somehow we got Rhonda up the steep shoulder and into the hearse.

The driver of the hearse asked me if they could take the dead man to the funeral home first before taking Rhonda to the hospital in Paducah. I read him the riot act. I told him that the man is not dead until he is declared dead by a doctor or the town's coroner who was out of town. I said that we are going to carefully put the man in the hearse. I told the driver's assistant to stay in the back of the hearse with Rhonda to keep her calm. If she asks about the man, he is just to tell her that he is unconscious. I ordered the driver of the hearse to stay up with me and to make sure he has on his seat belt. We were going to make a fast trip to Lourdes Hospital. I felt that if we got there fast enough, that Rhonda might survive. I turned on my police emergency equipment and began a race against time.

I called the Kentucky State Police dispatcher at Post 1. I told him that I was escorting two injured victims from the motorcycle accident to the emergency room at Lourdes Hospital. I asked him to alert the ER room that one person was unconscious and the other person was conscious with serious injuries. They were in a funeral home hearse with a funeral home employee. I felt that the proper thing to do would be to have the ER doctor examine the man and make the determination that the man was DOA (dead on arrival). This was the second time that I made a high speed run to the hospital from Bardwell. The first time, a young man, high on drugs, was creating a disturbance in a house in that town.

When I arrived, the young man panicked and jumped out a window. He severely cut his arm from the window glass and was losing a lot of blood. He was running away and I had to tackle him. I pulled off my sock and used it, along with my pen to make a tourniquet on his arm to stop the bleeding.

This time, the funeral home's hearse was not in town. I put the young man in the back of my police car. I told him not to let the tourniquet come loose. I called the Post 1 dispatcher and told him that no hearse was available to transport the injured man to the hospital. I asked the dispatcher to notify the ER at the hospital that I was coming in hot with the injured man and to be ready. The man was about to pass out when I made it to the ER. The doctor on duty told me that I did more than just save the man's arm. My tourniquet saved his life by keeping him from bleeding to death. It was not the last time that I was responsible for saving someone's life. I like to believe that I did some good when I was in law enforcement.

As it turned out, Rhonda survived. She was put in a double hip spica cast from her hip and down both legs. I checked on her a few times, on my off time. When she could be moved, her family came to take her home out of state. I assume that she fully recovered. I patrolled the river counties for about a year and a half. The owner of the service station in Bardwell, Bill Solomon, who serviced my police car, invited me for meals at his home. His children thought it was neat to have a State Trooper in uniform come for supper at their home. I had many friends in Carlisle County. I rented a room from a widower named Leon "Shorty" Thomas. I was treated like another member of his family.

One decade later, my wife, Paula was the Chief of Administrative Services at the Army Hospital on Fort Campbell. She was scheduled to attend a Records Management Conference in New Orleans. She asked me to come with her. I had accumulated several vacations days in the State Police. I remembered the Train Station in Fulton. I suggested that we take a sleeper car from Fulton. It's 438 miles from Fulton to New Orleans. It's a 12-hour or so train trip. She agreed.

We purchased our tickets in advance and they came in the mail. We drove from Cadiz to Fulton late at night. We arrived at the train station and parked in the fenced-in parking lot. It was 2:45 am. No one else was there. Then I saw a bright light, in the distance. It was the City of New Orleans passenger train. I remembered in the movies that the ticket clerk would wave a lantern standing on the tracks to get the train to stop. I did not have as much as a flashlight. I could hear the train slowing down. It came to a stop. The Conductor and the Sleeping Car Attendant got off the train and greeted us. The Attendant led us to our sleeping compartment. We traveled light with two suit cases. The Conductor radioed the engineer and, within less than three minutes, the train was on its way to New Orleans.

Riding in a sleeper car is more comfortable than sitting up in the coach section for 12 hours. I was tired and I feel asleep to the sounds of, "clickatee clack, clickatee clack, clickatee clack" as the passenger car wheels run from one steel rail to the next steel rail. Later that day, we went into the club car for breakfast. Paula went back to our sleeping

compartment. I decided to explore the passenger cars. The train had about 500 or more passengers. I went as far forward as I could. I opened the front passenger car door that leads to the mail car. That car's wheel shocks seemed to me to be worn out and the car was moving up and down some. I looked down at the couplings of the two cars. The buffer faces were also moving up and down. I was told it was normal. The suspension system on the passenger cars was far superior to the regular suspension on the mail car.

The average speed of the City of New Orleans train is 60 miles per hour. It has a maximum speed of 100 miles per hour. There is a popular song about the train that Paula and I were on. The name of the song is, "The City of New Orleans." The song was written by Steve Goodman in 1970. He had just gotten married and was traveling with his new bride to meet her grandmother in New Orleans. They were riding on the City of New Orleans train. As his wife was sleeping, Steve was writing notes about the scenery they were passing. When they returned home to Chicago, Steve completed his song. These are some of his lyrics: "Riding on the City of New Orleans, Illinois Central Monday morning rail. Fifteen cars and fifteen restless riders, three conductors and twenty-five sacks of mail. All along the southbound odyssey the train pulls out at Kankakee. Rolls along past houses, farms and fields. Passin' trains that have names, freight yards full of old men and the graveyards of the rusted automobiles. Good Morning America how are you? Don't you know me I'm your favorite son. I'm the train they call the City of New Orleans. I'll be gone 500 miles when the day is done. Dealin' cards with the old men in the club car, penny a point ain't no one keepin' score. Won't you pass the paper bag that holds the bottle...).

"Feel the wheels rumblin' neath the floor and the sons of the Pullman porters and the sons of engineers. Ride their fathers' magic carpets made of steel. And mothers with their babes asleep are rockin' to the gentle beat. And the rhythm of the rails is all they feel. Nighttime on the City of New Orleans, changing cars in Memphis, Tennessee. "Half way home, we'll be there by morning. Through the Mississippi darkness rolling down to the sea. But all the towns and people seem to fade into a bad dream. And the steel rail still ain't heard the news. The Conductor sings his songs again. The passengers will please refrain this train got the disappearing blues..."

I asked Paula to come with me when I had a Retired Military Police Officers Reunion in New Orleans in the 1990s. We rode the City of New Orleans for the second time from Fulton, Kentucky. Then Paula asked me to come with her for her last Records Management Conference. This was in Chicago, so we went back to Fulton to ride the train north to Chicago. From 2000 to 2003, I was the Army Reserve Inspector General for the 85th Division in Arlington Heights, north of Chicago. Paula came with me as we drove to that unit. Many times I wish I could have been on the City of New Orleans train. On one trip up north, we had to out run a tornado. I would speed faster than 100 miles per hour to get away from that twister.

Thomas Knight lost his father when he was six years old. Because his mother was too sick to raise him, he had to live with other relatives. He became a prolific song writer. He wrote the hymn, "Glory Train." These are most of his lyrics: "I want to ride that glory

train. I want to ride, ride, ride that glory train. Yes, all I want to do when my life on earth is through, is to get aboard and ride that glory train. Ah, there's a railroad train that's leavin' just rolling down the track. And the passengers aboard it boy, they're never coming back. It's a glory train that's leavin', it's the train I long to ride. To that home way up in heaven where God's children all abide. Hear the thunder of the engine, get aboard her if you can. For the final designation is that far off promised land. Where the Master will be waiting, in His home way up above. Just to fill our hearts with gladness and His great eternal love. When you get down to the station and the train's about to leave, you be sure you have a ticket, if you really do believe. That the Master's waiting for you in His home way up above. Just to fill our hearts with gladness and His great eternal love...)" You can watch a quartet sing that hymn on YouTube called the Cathedrals. They call it "Ride That Glory Train." This quartet performed from 1964 to 1999. Glen Payne, the lead singer, would dance around after the song and kick back his heels. He was quite a showman. He died in 1999 from cancer at the age of 72. When I think about the Train to New Orleans, I think of about Glen.

John F. Hall

\*Read other stories by John F. Hall and others at:

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