

From One Side of the Tracks to the Other

By Joanne D. Kiggins

His seventh grade teacher, Mrs. Kennedy, told him, "You are without a doubt the dumbest kid I have ever had in my class. You will never amount to anything." He got up from his desk and walked out the door ignoring her screams for him to come back.

Going home was no comfort. His mother was mean and domineering and when frustrated about anything she lashed out at him with a bullwhip. When he arrived home she intended to do just that, but didn't get the chance. He gathered his clothes, cut up the bullwhip--leaving it where his mother would find it, and he left.

With swift determination, in the middle of seventh grade, at age 13, he decided to search the world and fulfill his dream to be a cowboy or, anything really, as long as he could get away from school and his miserable home life.

He went to the railroad tracks in town, climbed into a boxcar, and began his journey to worlds unknown. He stopped in various towns across the western part of the United States only long enough to work for meals and be on his way to the next town, putting miles between him and his troubled life.

Fate would have it that he ran smack into problems during his freight train jumps. He once found himself faced with a tramp who tried to molest him. He jumped from the boxcar, brushed himself off, ran beside the train, grabbed a ladder on another boxcar and climbed to the roof. For a few minutes he felt safe until he climbed inside, the crew came by, closed the hatch, and he found himself in a refrigerated car. Cramped and cold he wondered *why me? Why can't I do things right? How will I get out of this mess?* Several hours later the train stopped, he was pulled out of the boxcar by the railroad police and given a beating he never forgot.

For five years he jumped train after train, traveled from town to town, worked at rodeos, farms and ranches, and cut wood to earn meals, never asking for a handout. Sheer determination kept him moving forward.

He worked in canneries, drove trucks, sold cars, and with no education he passed the exam to be an insurance agent, entered into real estate sales and became an entrepreneur in manufacturing products for the amateur (ham) radio and commercial radio market.

When I asked him what was the one thought that motivated him to continue, he answered, "I kept saying to myself why can't I do things right? I am not stupid, I will show the world one day."

And he did!

A number of years ago I purchased his book, *From a 13 year old Hobo to an Entrepreneur*, at a local library book sale. The title and book jacket intrigued me. His story was moving; one of perseverance and courage, and left an impression on my heart.

From 1935 to 1939 he hopped freight trains trying to find a better life. At the age of 17 he joined the CCC camp. He married in 1940, at age 18, and is still married to Dorothy after 64 years. He was in the infantry in Germany during World War II and received the Silver Star, Bronze Star and Purple Heart.

When Jenna announced that the "7th grade" was this week's theme, I knew immediately whom my story would be about. But my story had to have a special touch, because he had left such an impression on me. I contacted Mr. Gracey by e-mail asking him if he'd be so kind to answer a few questions for me, then I held my breath waiting for a response. Within a few hours he answered my questions and asked for my address so he could send me an autographed copy of the 3rd edition of his book.

When asked what he'd like to say to his seventh grade teacher, Gracey said, "Mrs. Kennedy, I am sorry that I caused you lots of stress, however I feel that I could have done much better if I had better training when I first started school in the first grade. By the time I reached your class, I was a lost cause. Possibly you could have done better by understanding my problems."

His book will be one that I retain on my bookshelf for the rest of my life and Everett L. Gracey will be in my heart for that long as well.

Everett L. Gracey's book is now in its third printing under the title *From Freight Trains to Airplanes* and has been written into a movie script and picked up by a well known producer. "I am holding my breath while waiting," he said.



Everett L. Gracey

Gracey has two other books published as well.

My 20 Years of RV Adventures is a practical guide of what to look for when purchasing a new RV. If you're planning to sell your home and head for the highway, Gracey's book is a must read, full of unbelievable but true adventures and advice that will help you avoid costly mistakes.

Buying and Selling Real Estate by Owner is an absolute wonderful tool for anyone who wants to know what to look for when purchasing a home, or how to sell a home with or without a Real Estate agent.

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