

# GROWING UP PENNSY WITH MY DAD

By Rick Westergren



*(Above) This picture shows Dad third from the left after a promotion with some of his co-workers. Richard Westergren collection. (Below right) Reconstruction of Union Station in Washington, D.C. after the 1953 wreck of the "Federal" was a major assignment for him. Tim Garner collection.*

A military brat is a child raised in a military family who follows his parent from base to base and town to town attending new schools at every stop. I guess you could say I was a Pennsy brat.

My dad's name was Robert A. Westergren, but everybody knew him as Bob. He was born in 1917 and served 19 years with the PRR, always in engineering in some capacity. He was the first and last railroader in the family.

Dad's first job with the PRR was in Erie, Pennsylvania where he met my mother. His next assignment was at Pittsburgh in 1942. He was working there when they wed.

His third job was in Canton, Ohio in 1945. I was born there. Dad was a master carpenter at that time. In 1948, we moved to Sunbury, Pennsylvania where my sister Susan was born. In 1949 we moved to Terre Haute, Indiana. While there, he took us all to see the Chicago Railroad Fair.

In 1950, we moved to Baltimore, Maryland. In 1951, we moved north to Harrisburg. There, Dad was primarily responsible for track, bridges, and building maintenance. He headed up a lot of different departments.



On January 15, 1953, the "Federal" lost its brakes and crashed into Union Station in Washington, D.C. Immediately after the accident, Dad was transferred to Washington to lead the reconstruction effort as Assistant Division Engineer. I remember him walking me around the station during reconstruction. His office was on the third floor. My brother Randy was born while we lived in D.C.

I remember him being extremely proud of the redesigned and rebuilt Station Master's Office. He told me that the GG1 had literally gone through the original. The board announcing the trains was totally new and state of the art.

After the work was done, he was transferred back to Harrisburg as Division Engineer on the Philadelphia Division in 1955, later promoted to District Engineer. His office was in the Harrisburg Station. Our home was in Camp Hill across the Susquehanna River.

Dad was always on call for any railroad mishaps. Many times train wrecks spoiled family outings. Dad had to jump in the car and take off for the wreck site. We always feared calls from the "movement desk." Once in a while in the late 1950s, he would take me with him. The wrecks were often frightening. Huge locomotive were on their sides. Freight cars were tossed about. Track was bent and ties torn up like toothpicks. The best part was the big sandwiches they made in the kitchen car of the wreck and maintenance trains.

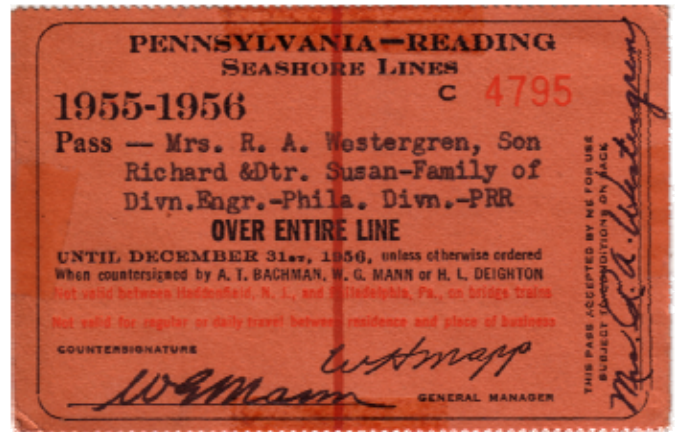
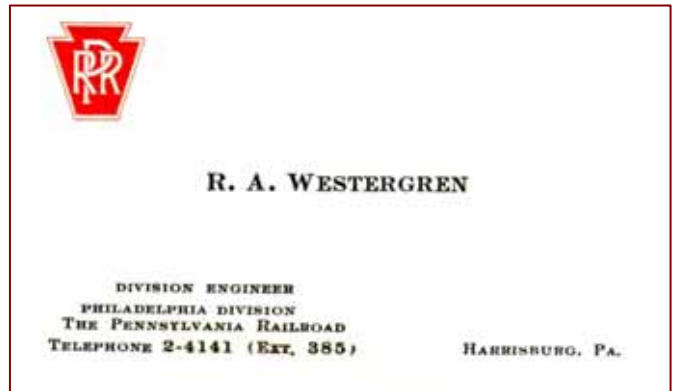
While he was on the PRR, I did get to do some interesting things. I loved the railroad picnics. I particularly remember the ones in a small county park next to the Bush River Bridge in Edgewood, Maryland. We went to the Blue Mountain Club near Harrisburg. We took train trips to Erie to visit relatives. I even got to ride the "Aerotrain" during its brief time on the PRR.

Dad occasionally took movies of railroad activities. One segment we still have shows the crew manually opening the drawbridge over Bush River in Maryland. Here, they had to unbolt the rails and slide the catenary to the side like opening curtains so they could raise the span and let the taller pleasure boats pass.

When we were kids, Dad bought us Lionel trains including the GG1. Somewhere along the line, he sold them and switched us to HO. I've since bought the same trains through eBay to go along with my MTH "Aerotrain".

All together, Dad moved 26 times while working on the railroad. By the late 1950s, he lost his enthusiasm for railroading and wanted to earn more money. He resigned in 1959.

After he left, he started a home building business in the Harrisburg area. Unfortunately, people couldn't afford the quality he built into them. Later he worked at Allied Chemical and Cyanamid Chemical. He was killed in an auto accident at age 56 on January 29, 1973.



(Top Right) Bob Westergren's final business card for the PRR.

(Middle right) These are two of the passes the railroad issues for my mother, my sister, and I. One is for the P-RSL and the other is for the whole PRR system.

(Bottom right) My father's last office was one floor above the street at the Harrisburg train station. Tim Garner photo.

