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# Taking the train to Brooklyn

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My grandmother lived in a brownstone house in Brooklyn at 270 Stuyvesant Ave. The last time we visited her there would have been in the spring of 1914 for she died that summer in Sea Cliff when I was seven years old.

Our trips to Brooklyn were always an adventure whether for holidays such as Thanksgiving or Christmas or just for a day's visit. Mother and I would be driven to the Roslyn Railroad Station in the cart. First Mother would buy the tickets from Mr. Cody, the station master, then we would go out on the platform and listen for the train as it came from Oyster Bay. A steam train made a lot of noise. It could be heard way up the track and it whistled just as it came in sight of the station. It was always a thrill to watch the huge black engine and tender

go by and stop just at the right spot to line up the baggage and mail platform at the station with the baggage and mail car on the train. Then, if there was baggage or mail to go to the City it could be put aboard.

Behind the baggage car were usually three passenger cars. The wooden cars were all brightly painted a dark red with "Long Island Railroad" in beautiful, large, gold letters the length of the car. At either end of each car were iron gates and fences to keep the passengers and trainmen from falling off. When the conductor called, "All Aboard," and the gates clanked shut, there was a feeling that all was well.

The cars were very clean and they had a new smell. The seats always faced forward, for the backs were movable and could be changed to suit the direction of the train. They were upholstered in a thick dark material which

scratched a bit but assured a small boy that he was riding in something special.

Mother always let me sit by the window and she sat on the aisle. She gave the tickets to the conductor who told us to change at Jamaica for the Brooklyn train, just as they do today. Sometimes the conductor would be "Gimpy" Seaman, who knew my father. He got his nickname because he had a wooden leg and limped. He liked to talk to the passengers so he looked out of the window.

I liked to sit on the right hand side of the train for there seemed to be more interesting things to see on that side. It also saved me from being scared when a passing train rushed by.

The first thing of interest on the trip was the Roslyn Freight Station where there was always a lot of activity. Wagons drawn by teams of horses, and sometimes

an automobile truck, would be loading from freight cars on the sidings.

Then we went by the power house of the Nassau Light and Power Company for which Power House Rd. is named. Beyond the power house was the Rushmore Farm and the Bloodgood Nursery, Albertson station on the north side of I.U. Willets Rd., more farms and then the stop at East Williston. There I had the chance to see the wagon factory and the farm machinery showrooms of Oakley and Griffin.

Between East Williston and Mineola we passed more farms, and when we had passed Jericho Tpk., the train went by an orphan asylum where there were apt to be boys about my age at play, all dressed alike in gray uniforms. They seemed to be having a good time and they stopped to wave and watch the train go by. I would wave back but I felt sad for them.

After the train passed the orphan asylum it joined the main line and came to the Mineola station. There we stopped again to take on passengers. As we pulled out of Mineola station, I could see a very imposing building with brown shingles and white trim. It

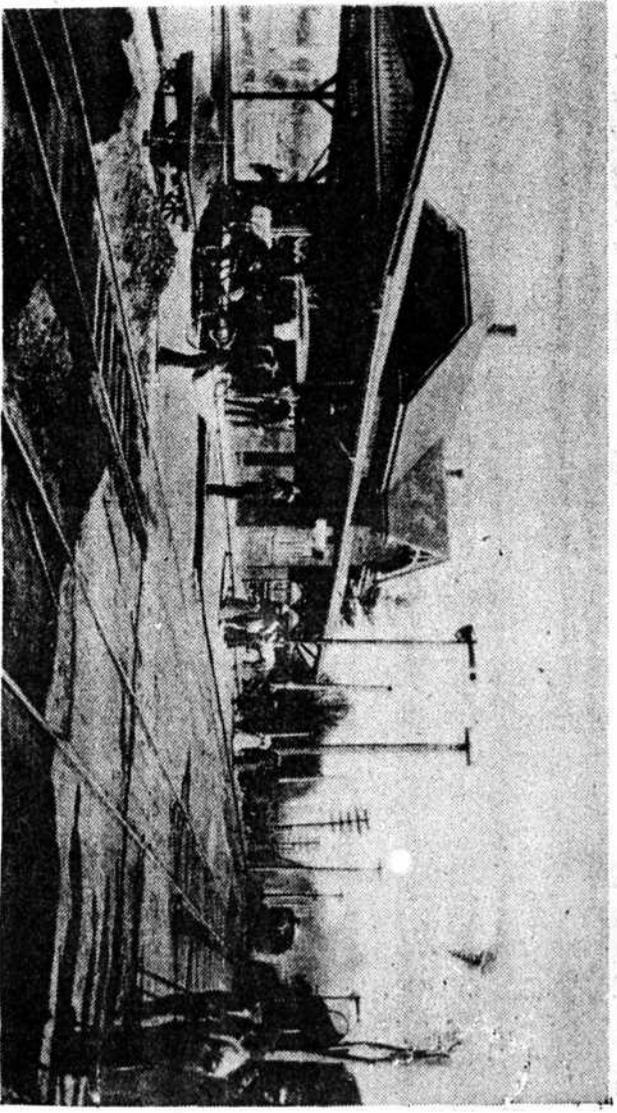
was the Nassau Hospital. It sat way back from the railroad tracks at the end of a wide green lawn. Today the wide green lawn has been replaced by a multi-storied parking facility and the brown shingled building replaced by the present hospital.

The Long Island Railroad still runs to Brooklyn on the same right-of-way as it did before 1914 but, oh, how different the trip is now. I know this from experience because I took the train to Brooklyn in the spring of 1979. I saw very few things that I remembered seeing as a boy.

Our train, before 1914, did not stop at Merrillon Ave. It went flying by New Hyde Park and Floral Park, where there was a tall brick building with a round tower which contained the offices of a seed company. It steamed through Hollis and Union Hall St. stations to Jamaica. Except for houses and stores near the stations, most of the landscape was farm land.

Jamaica was a very different place, too. It was exciting with large buildings housing stores, factories, churches, and theatres. It also had a big station which was

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ROSLYN RAILROAD STATION as it looked in 1908. Note the single track beyond the Roslyn station.

# Reminiscences of My Boyhood in Roslyn

# REMINISCENCES

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just being built. At that time, the tracks were on ground level but the overhead tracks were being built. There always seemed to be a number of trains coming and going.

We had to use temporary wooden platforms to get to the Brooklyn train. This train was electric. The cars were metal and they had cane seats. The ends of

each car were enclosed and did not have iron gates, but sliding doors. I was told that each car had an electric motor so that the train did not need an engine. The engineer stood in the front of the first car and operated the train from there. I did not like these trains so much as the steam trains that went through Roslyn.

Again I would sit on the right

side. As soon as the train started I began to watch for the Long Island Railroad yards at Morris Park. In this year, there were more steam locomotives than one could count, going and coming. After we passed them, the train went into a tunnel under the street and, if the lights had not come on, it would have been very dark. The tunnel was always scary at first, but as the grown-ups didn't seem to mind, I took courage and before I

knew it, the train popped out at street level again and we were at the East New York station.

Mother told me that my father got off here to take the Broadway trolley to Flushing Ave. where he served a cashier of the Broadway Bank of Brooklyn. The train began to climb as we left the East New York station and soon we were riding above the street. Below us horse vans and carriages as well as automobiles and auto trucks moved along the cobblestone streets.

The last point of interest was St. John's Hospital where I was born. Soon after this, the train stopped at the Nostrand Ave. station and Mother and I got off. We had arrived in Brooklyn.

Now we had to walk down a long flight of steps to the street and wait for the proper trolley car to take us near my grandmother's. The trolley cars were always a mystery to me. I was fascinated by the number of them. They all looked alike and all traveled on the same track though I was told they all went to different places.

Mother knew which car to take and it always went to the right place. We got off at the right stop and walked a short block, and there we were at 270.

I remember the gold numerals on the plate glass door at the top of the brownstone steps. We rang the bell and the door was opened by either my grandmother or my Aunt Estelle, my father's sister.

After kisses and hugs all around, which I suffered ungraciously, I ran downstairs to the dining room to look in the cookie jar on the sideboard to see if I had lady fingers or macaroons.

Grandmother kept either one or the other in this very special cookie jar. It was a china jar which was made to look as if it were made of cloth and had a pretend drawstring around the top. (This cookie jar now sits on the shelf over the south windows in my dining room to remind me of times long ago.) Having inspected the cookie jar and sampled its contents, I returned upstairs to join the family.

I really enjoyed my visits to my grandmother. I was not only an only child, but also an only grandchild. And was, therefore, the beneficiary of a great deal of attention. Nevertheless, I did hunger for the companionship of other children for there did not seem to be any other children on the block. So I had no one to play with in the city. In fact the only time I remember seeing other children in the house was on Thanksgiving Day when in the afternoon we would be visited by a horde of ragamuffins, children dressed as street urchins carrying sacks or baskets in which to take away nuts and fruit given out by the householders where they visited, very much as the Halloween visitors do today.

I wanted so much to be a part of them, to be dressed as they were, and go house to house with them. I wanted a sack or a basket to ask for nuts or apples, but no one understood me. I was told we didn't know them, that they were not the kind of children I should play with. I would then be distracted with delightful games, such as old maid or parcheesi, and my heartache would pass.