

ABBY

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Chapter 45 - Blue Bayou Railroad

The next flock of interns restored an elderly passenger car someone found somewhere. Our lowboy couldn't handle the length, so lengthening that became a project. Except one of the states wouldn't let us run the over length trailer there. The mainline railroad's staff wanted to help us, but there were limits on what they could do.

That passenger car caused trouble right from the beginning. The wooden center sill had rotted at one end allowing the coupler there to pull completely out. Couplers are mounted by attaching to a draft gear that isn't a gear at all, but a pivot with a spring. The railroad at its location turned it around and attached it to the rear end of a freight train. An inspector noted a passenger car attached to a freight train as a violation of the rules. He demanded it be side tracked for lacking working air brakes.

The only remedy became loading it on a flat car. The old wooden framed car creaked and groaned at being lifted off of its trucks. Those trucks were freight car trucks, not passenger car trucks, and were sent along too.

We had disassembled the ramp for unloading the locomotive. We made a new and better one for unloading this decrepit old wooden passenger car. That turned into a two step process of remounting it on those incorrect trucks, and then rolling it off. Without brakes we didn't dare leave it alone without chocking its wheels.

Our in-house computer guru Misty had come to us as an Adult Baby Diaper Lover. Whenever he became bored he would retreat to his quarters and spend time in his erotic fantasies. The residents regarded him as crazy. Nice, safe, and quiet, but crazy. His wife Christina had a Ph.D., and served as our in-house psychotherapist. Her answer about Misty as his ABDL self had grown in his head at a very early age of seven or eight, and that had to be the way for him. His diapers were changed and his breasts were pumped the same as everyone else even though they all thought of him as crazy.

Crazy Misty came to a meeting of the Railroad Club. He had always been a member. He had a small plank in his hand colored Tuscan Red which we all knew as a prior standard color for railway box cars. That passenger car had been Tuscan Red before the paint faded and became streaked with grime in every color from white to black. He didn't say a word until we had all gone out to the full sized railroad. We referred to it as scaled twelve inches to the foot to distinguish it from the model railroad indoors at an approximate scale of 1:48, or one inch to four feet. When asked he reported he had made an undersized replacement plank by 3D printing for the side of the passenger car. If we would buy a much larger printer he could make replacement planks, flooring, siding, fascia boards, and roof pieces for the passenger car. We did. The parts paraded out of his computer office.

He surprised us with another idea he presented as a 3D printed model. The locomotive restoration had disrupted our area of the railroad tracks through a cut under the highway bridge and under our parking lot. This passenger car increased the chaos. We had major items out in the rain for a growing machine shop. He and his model proposed developing an area of a train shed on a concrete pad with a second story of a stout concrete floor as a major machine shop. The area he suggested required concrete pillars, a porous retaining wall, and filling with major amounts of soggy swamp dirt. He designed it lengthwise with space for two eighty foot long passenger cars on the same track. One of the four tracks would have a lengthy pit between the rails for working on cars and locomotives from underneath.

The general reaction showed as frowns. Where could we find the money for such a project? Crazy Misty didn't back down; instead he grinned. One of our quietest reserved women residents had Dr. Christina talk about how we did things with a short loud speech in the dining hall one evening. The restaurant, gas station, car and truck repair, trucking company, and garden shop were collectively making so much money that we had not called for donations from the residents' disability income for months. How about we ALL donate Five Hundred Dollars a month from our growing savings accounts? That meant over Four Hundred Thousand a month for OUR Blue Bayou Railroad. Even the residents who didn't pay the railroad much attention, mostly women, now owned this project as their own.

The Architectural Committee went to work. They found the space on the other side of our hill from the highway. They also identified a glitch in the proposed space of being perpendicular and too close to the tracks.

Misty grinned. He had beat them to it. He reprinted the 3D model with a turntable. Its hundred foot proposed length fit in much better than a track curve with a standard four hundred foot radius. It would turn our steam locomotive around. He added another feature of building up a slope of our track on that side rising to the level of the turntable and shed. The new train shed would be above every flood level we could imagine, and then some more from an abundance of caution. The main floor became so high the building code people threw a fit and wouldn't back down. The answer became a storage area on the downhill side under the level with the tracks.

Misty ganged up with the Architectural Committee for me to go talk to the concrete ready-mix company we had mostly used in all of our prior construction. My gut clenched up as I stepped off the van that took me there. Inside a front desk person played nice which frightened me even more. I didn't sit down; I stood there. Forty-five minutes later a guy at least double my age came out. He didn't snarl or growl when his strict business face did all that to me. He didn't invite me into his office.

I explained how much concrete we had bought before, and we had a new project that would need much more. I wanted a discount rate, and we would pick it up at the plant. Old ready mix concrete trucks were a drag on the market. Our mechanics would buy a pair and put them in working order.

He growled. "Won't work. Buy four." He explained why with the time lost washing them out, loading, and unloading. The price of concrete for us dropped to less than half.

Misty had Wheelchair Bob search on the internet. Because of them we bought an expensive 3-D printer that worked with concrete. They made sections to be lowered into bore holes, rebar added, and filled with concrete. Those holes were bored way down to a hard sandy bottom, and flared out for a wider footer.

The single track mainline railroad that ran through a cut on our property had always been jointly operated by the UP and BNSF railroads. Their long heavy freight trains became noisier, and rattled everything nearby. A maintenance of way inspection used our tracks to get out of the way of a main line freight coming through. The Chief Inspector noted the vibration, the noise, and the speed had grown to nearly twice the authorized speed. He reacted. The speeds dropped from forty miles an hour to about twenty. He called for a rail grinder. He pointed out that the rails had developed ripples at wave lengths of twenty millimeters to two hundred millimeters. Once he told us we could see those ourselves. The huge, noisy rail grinder threw massive amounts of red and yellow hot sparks. It caught a fifty five gallon drum of ours on fire from the oil, grease, and rag waste that had been thrown in there.

The scream of "fire" attracted a large crowd. As I stood there watching efforts to douse that fire I had a weird thought. The people trying their hardest enjoyed the excitement. They enjoyed that fire when I did not.

Our track crept around and through the shopping center and onward to the south. It went quite a ways before a wildlife refuge would not allow us to build through them. We turned the track east to by-pass the refuge. A swamp drainage gully blocked our way. Crossing that gully needed a bridge. A shipyard found an old government surplus truss bridge that appeared quite authentic for the vintage of our locomotive.

A community south-east of us built a snack and gift shop like a vintage train station. We ran Saturday and Sunday excursions there as our track construction crept along. The snack and gift shop staff wore period costumes of the Indian, Mexican, Cajun, Creole, French, and Civil War history. The stops there grew longer with historical videos, and shows.

One of our dirty little secrets about laying railroad track came from the swampy land. If the bulldozer worked the roadbed flat enough by scooping up water logged dirt, we didn't need any ballast. The advisors from the other heritage railroads were scandalized, but it worked most of the time. We did buy a derelict large bulldozer for our own, restored it, and fitted it with a GPS device to help it make smooth level roadbed. It spawned another Community College course in heavy construction equipment.

We invented and then discovered others had of a way for the rails to expand and contract with the extremes of the southern temperatures. Every nine rails of 39 feet each made 351 feet where two rails were cut and ground with a long taper for slipping past each other.

Our track grew, and had several switches. We had so much railroad equipment we had to expand the tracks and move the train sheds out from under both our parking garage and the highway bridge.

When word got out with what we were doing we were asked to restore other railroad passenger cars. That made us real money lifting them off their trucks and completely disassembling those springs and related truck parts for a Federal inspection.

Light weight aluminum tops had to be lifted off the steel frames for checking the corrosion. We did that while leaving the fancy wood interiors attached to the exterior tops. The aluminum had typically corroded like crazy. We invented our own way of adding aluminum down there to the aluminum sides. The Federal inspectors glared when they first saw what we were doing, and then approved it. We happily advertised our approved restoration methods as less expensive.

A beat up gondola car became a gift to us which we overhauled making it into an open passenger car for sightseers.

The kids loved watching the turntable. We had a chain link fence on the concrete perimeter out of fear they would fall into the pit and hurt themselves. One of our residents had childhood memories of playing in the dirt under a porch. The dirt in the turntable had dried out after being hauled out of a swamp. It became quite smooth and mostly pebble free. Couldn't the kids play in that?

With reservations we asked the parents of the kids visiting the projects in the train sheds. Those were mostly Moms. They asked how?

We cut into the concrete retaining wall, and made concrete low height steps going down maybe three feet to the bottom of the pit. The kids screamed with delight. We put a bucket down there for any pebbles they found. The rules were no fighting and no bullying. A restaurant intern kept watch. The hired staff frowned. The jail work release people instantly got it. They knew how to fight. They would go into the pit, break up any fighting, and bring the miscreant out. Yelling, kicking, and screaming had no value against one or two work release men.

After one such episode the staff called me for calming the parents. Fortunately I already wore a skirt-suit and airbrushed makeup for other purposes. I simply listened. When the bully lied, the staff corrected his story. His Mom quickly had enough, grabbed her boy by the wrist, and towed him out of there. Perhaps I hadn't even said a word.

The other Mom sat in a plastic lawn chair that had been absent mindedly left there. She held her crying child in her lap.

I sent one of the residents to the restaurant for tea, lemonade, toast, butter, spoonbread, and tupelo honey thinking that would help. Dr. Christina and Tara arrived with the treats.

As I stood there feeling useless and stupid, with Christina and Tara doing a marvelous job, I had a vision. The Mom and her child sat in a triangle formed by the tracks, the turntable, the train shed, and the hill. What if we put up an awning over the triangle with patio style plastic tables and chairs for the parents who were mostly Moms? They could repose comfortably in the shade as their kids played in the safe dirt.

Instant success. One of the intern servers in the restaurant suggested a simple menu, and an intern could be on daytime duty. If anyone wanted more than the simple menu, that could be brought from the Cap'n Jackie restaurant. The bottom of the plasticized one page menu had a short statement. The servers on "the patio" were all unpaid interns. They could not accept tips because of all the rules from the state, the insurance company, and anyone else who chimed in. The interns had decided that all tips would go for a fund for things the interns needed including clothes, medical care, and whatever else their own committee approved. The interns could tell when a Mom first read that short statement when her eyes scrunched up. The tips became generous.

A teenage boy broke the rules as he pushed aside a barrier and darted into the non-public working area of the train shed. The staff had foreseen the possibility. The four jail work release men on location made themselves into the four corners of the area where the employed staff and interns thought the kid had gone. They closed in on that passenger car that had required all that work, and needed more. The employed staff surrounded that car with particular attention on all the missing windows. The work

release men climbed the steps.

The kid popped his head up in that car and made to jump out of a missing window. The staff watching from down below told him he would break a leg jumping onto hard concrete from that high up. He hesitated.

The four jail work release men in that car grabbed him. They did not play nice. When the kid resisted too much they slugged him in the gut. Doubled over he had no resistance to their tying his wrists behind his back with plastic ties. They picked him up, and carried him out and down while he continued wheezing.

Dr. Christina, Tara, part of their students, and I arrived after being summoned. Dr. Christina took the horrified Mom aside. Two of the psychology students sat with the kid named Eddie Hepperd tied to a plastic chair.

Tara and I wrote down notes from the staff in the train shed.

Two hours later Tara told me what they thought. Eddie had been ignored way too long. His misbehavior at school and everywhere else had been his trying to get attention. Not that anybody had actually ignored him. For reasons unknown he needed more attention than most teens.

The Mansion House residents having been kidnaped and tortured had become separated from other life experiences. That a kid would need the help Eddie needed had become beyond their comprehension.

The first result from this experience grew into our having a social worker type of service in a vacant retail store. The love we provided ourselves and our customers had a bigger need. No charge both helped and hurt. It helped by keeping us out of the clutches of the state professional services regulations, requirements, and licensing. It hurt when patients become too dependent.

Eddie's Mom began attending our church. She brought more Moms.

The next result came from Eddie, himself. He wanted to intern. The train shed decided not in there. He joined the track laying crew where he excelled out in the heat, humidity, and slimy mud of the swamp. He excelled so much our letter on his internship landed him a job with the track crews on the big mainline railroad that ran through our property.

That single track that ran through our property carried an Amtrak passenger train every mid-afternoon. They ran it three times a week in each direction, making a train six times a week. They ran it too fast. Eddie worked on a maintenance of way train and knew they could park it on our tracks when the Amtrak train came through. It traveled at forty to forty-five miles an hour that afternoon, or about double the allowed speed. Eddie called the dispatcher. He also knew to inspect the rail heads for distortion, which he and they found.

He thought up, the mainline agreed, and one of our people boarded the Amtrak passenger train in the nearest big city having bought a ticket to our little unincorporated town. Bringing that train to a stop slowed it down. When it stopped the railroad inspectors were waiting. They downloaded the engine's recorder from the earlier trip east and the return trip west before anyone where could fiddle with the speed records.

That noisy rail grinder came though again although this time it didn't have so much to do. They told us they billed Amtrak, but we had our doubts. We installed a speed recorder and called the division dispatcher any time the recorder reported a train going over twenty-five miles an hour. The locomotive engineers learned to behave.

The track crews were spreading more gravel along the mainline and had an automated tamper pound the gravel down between and under the crossties. That darn thing spewed noise and vibration. It also gave the tracks better support on the swampy ground. Eddie visited our Social Worker office from time to time. They reported he told them how he felt loved by us. How he wanted to return that love.

He did. One of those long gravel trains left a pair of hopper cars on our side track. We sent a team to investigate, but could find nothing wrong with them except age and mischievous spray paint on their sides. Eddie arrived that evening. He explained those two cars were a donation to us from a hundred of those cars. He showed us how to open a bottom flap one notch as the car moved to easily spread gravel.

We scowled and thought Eddie would be in big trouble and fired. We didn't quite know how to ask the railroad without getting Eddie in trouble. The next morning the Division Dispatcher office wanted to know if we had emptied those two cars.

Huh? They were serious.

We fired up our ole 214 steam locomotive and spread gravel from the start of our track going past the shopping center. The result had humps in the spread gravel.

Eddie called Misty and the two of them invented a home grown spreader and tamper out of an abused old flat car powered by a noisy diesel engine. The operator had to individually align the tamper feet at the right place each time. He wore ear muff hearing protectors that played music. We added a plexiglass patio cover for protecting him and the diesel from the day time sun's heat.

The railroad club had a jaundiced view about running our steam locomotive on so many days. It needed constant maintenance.

Wheelchair Bob researched on the Internet and found an elderly diesel-electric locomotive called a GE 44 tonner. Those had been made in the 1940s and early 1950s. The low price suggested it needed work, the description reported it needed work, and the imagery looked like it needed work. Bob and Misty talked insisted we buy it anyway. The Heritage Railroads all had old railcars waiting for restoration, or scrapping for parts. They reluctantly supported each other on a vague feeling of need. Bob and Misty had worked on them for the owner to sell us the 44 tonner. Another sold us the proper passenger car trucks for our elderly wooden passenger car.

The locomotive arrived towed by a freight train. Our railroad staff started it, but it sounded bad. It needed all it had climbing the ramp up to the turntable and train shed.

The next bad news came from the fraying insulation on all the electrical lines. One of the cylinders failed a compression test on one of the two diesel engines. The other diesel engine wasn't all that healthy.

Wheelchair Bob went to work searching the internet for replacement diesel engines. He found one that would fit. Fetching it would be nearly a two day drive both ways.

Shannon volunteered if she could take a truck with a camper. That meant a big rig tractor-trailer truck. She and others had invented a way to keep our trucks moving with a reputation for the fastest deliveries. The Federal regulations limited driving to no more than eleven hours in twenty-four. Three drivers would team up for each driving eight hours a day and keep the big truck rolling twenty-four hours a day. One driving, one talking, and one sleeping. Our older trucks had a bed for sleeping, but not the traveling palace of the newer trucks. The guys didn't do so well with this. The gals would sit there chatting for hours and hours. We had married couples as drivers.

Shannon and Kayla figured they could go the 1700 miles from us to the location of that engine in twenty-two hours if no one noticed their speed. Shannon had been training Kayla. Oklahoma allowed trainees to drive. Loading the replacement engine should be good for two hours off of their driving log. It would work.

They departed with Cap'n Jackie pre-cooked meals, snacks, sodas, comfy extra clothes, and our standard big first aide kit. Their five gallons of water had been intended to be enough for a big rig with a leaky radiator to limp to the next service plaza.

About a hundred and fifty miles out they saw a big rig pulled over on the side of the Interstate. They had stopped for those and did for this one. Shannon stepped down from the passenger's seat, and walked to the driver's side of the cab of the stopped tractor-trailer truck. She heard a strange noise and went around the front of the cab. The driver sat on a right side step as he threw up with blood.

Shannon trotted back to our truck and selected a State Police channel. "This is Shannon of Cedar Valley Trucking. We stopped for a big rig parked on the shoulder near milepost 129. The driver is throwing up blood. Send a cruiser and an ambulance."

The State Police had heard too many fake calls. "What number and color does your Cedar Valley cab have?" The first we heard of this is when the Trooper called our office for confirmation. Our truck cabs used a coded numbering system most people could never guess based on when we put the truck back on the road all spiffy and newly painted our color of green.

She and Kayla heard the first siren in three minutes, followed by more. Shannon added a little water to a Red Solo Cup and carried that to the driver. He waved his hand for no.

Within two minutes the Trooper and Med-Techs had that driver in that ambulance spinning gravel with its siren screaming.

Shannon wiped the sweat from her face from standing in the hot sun. She climbed up into that unknown cab. She opened the side window and called down to the Trooper. "Any idea what they were hauling? I can't find any manifest." She turned off the engine and handed the keys down to the Officer.

The two of them plus the other police collected at the back of the trailer. The Officer tried various keys in the lock and found one that worked.

Inside with forty or more hot, sick, dehydrated, starving, and dying immigrants. The Troopers climbed up in there to help them out. They were too weak. All five feet two inches of Shannon caught them as they jumped or were dropped out. Kayla gave each one a small dose of water in a solo cup and sent them to the shade made by the trailer. Of the dozen thought to be dead there were two that had only passed out.

Shannon divined and then asked, if maybe the last thing the State Police needed would be forty-two, or so, dying immigrants. Could she call the Cedar Valley dispatcher and have the available vans and busses sent to carry these unfortunates down to the Cedar Valley home base?

The police were delighted.

She asked if they could arrange a cruiser to bring those vans and busses at top speed? Get these poor folks to food, water, and medical care as quickly as possible. Shannon called and explained to us what she had invented.

We saw two cruisers with flashing lights and sirens escort our collection of Mansion House vans and busses out onto the Interstate. One of our drivers spoke limited Spanish, which turned out to be more than everyone else up there.

We took over the community room under the Sanctuary of the church across the highway. Cap'n Jackie delivered simple hot and cold foods including tacos. The hospital provided medical assistance. The staff heard about this and assembled in and around the church. They didn't tell me they went to the athletic and sport store in the shopping mall and bought every baseball bat and oar they had and their distributor could deliver.

The buses and vans arrived. These abused people smelled awful. They were hustled, or carried, to the men's and women's restrooms in the basement which had showers. Clothes arrived. Their clothes went to our industrial strength laundry. The medical people gave them a quick physical, and medication for what they found. Our few Spanish speakers talked them into allowing their blood to be drawn. They couldn't hold down much food too fast. They saw more as available when they could handle it.

Cots were assembled with bedding. The few who couldn't walk were carried to a cot. Others almost collapsed. Most fell asleep quickly. The rest had been too traumatized.

The State Police remained outside as more Troopers arrived, but not too many.

Feeling especially useless and stupid inside with those refugees, I went outside with the Police. There were at least four of our residents, employed staff, jail work release men, and interns outside at every entrance to the church. More joined them. Each one had a baseball bat or an oar. All of the work release men had an oar. I got it that the edge of the blade of the aluminum oar could be used in a menacing way.

Peggy and Sharon came for me and towed me back to the Mansion House for changing my diaper, pumping my breasts, adding airbrushed make up, and putting me into my best apricot skirt-suit with a peach blouse. They brushed my long blond hair with a conditioner and clipped it so it rested over my right shoulder. I asked. "Why?"

"Trouble is coming. We did much the same for our lawyer Danielle." They sent me back to the church with a whack on my padded butt. "Go, Cindi, go. We love you."

Shortly after I returned to the area outside of the church a pair of black, very glossy, SUVs arrived. The men inside dismounted wearing armored vests and dripping with police equipment.

Danielle pushed me in front of the main door. Four work release men with those oars stood behind us. Others with baseball bats stood nearby on both sides.

Four of these black uniformed men pulled up their belts and walked to me. Perhaps sauntered would be a better description.

I didn't want to push my low voice but just so much. "Yes?"

I could see their armored vests were labeled "ICE" in a badge for Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The heaviest one growled. "We're going to inspect the church for illegal immigrants."

Fortunately Danielle had warned me. I responded. "Show me your signed warrant."

He glared as he flashed a sheet of paper.

"I need to read that. Better have my lawyer read it."

His eyes turned mean as he took a step forward.

The four jail work release men near me with their oars moved a half step forward as I took a step backwards. Others with their baseball bats lined up on each side of the men with the oars. More men made a line behind me, and on each side.

From behind those oar wielding men I recited a few words. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all people are created equal, they are endowed by their creator with life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Abe Lincoln quoted that. Danielle?"

His voice cracked. "All people are protected by due process."

That big heavy mean one put his hand on the arm of a work release man who quickly had that rough edged oar under the ICE officer's chin.

Danielle interrupted. "I'm a member of the State Bar. Hand me that warrant."

A jail work release man yanked that sheet of paper out of the heavy one's hand and passed it to Danielle.

"Not signed. Not valid. You can't go in. Deliver notice to myself and my client for the hearing in open court for having this signed. Better have the right form too, as this one is neither right nor good enough."

A voice from behind me went into command mode. "Half a step forward. Move."

Our men and women did just that. Their movement pushed the ICE force back by that much.

A State Police officer moved to Danielle's side and read that sheet of paper. "He is correct. It isn't signed, and it isn't good enough anyway."

"Are you challenging and disrespecting a Federal Officer?"

"No. Anyone can buy that uniform at a party costume shop. Show me genuine ID."

A man behind me repeated that command. "Half a step forward. Move."

And again.

The ICE officers were being forced back to their SUVs.

More baseball bat men formed around the ICE officers sealing them off from the growing crowd with people from the shopping center.

"Full step forward. Move."

The State Police intervened. "Make space. Let them return to their cars."

The next morning Danielle had me at the new, spiffy Federal Courthouse. At least he didn't look intimidated although I did not fare so well right from the parking lot. The security station seemed worse to me. We sat in the hall terrifying me. My gut hurt when we were called into a courtroom. The formality scared me.

Danielle explained his emergency motion for protection from bogus search warrants.

The woman judge appeared very official. She had her law clerk call the nearby Department of Justice office. A young man in a business suit scurried in. The Judge sent him out to summon an ICE representative. When the Rep arrived the Judge made a short summary, and asked. "Any explanation?"

The ICE rep had no idea. He hadn't heard a thing.

The Judge scowled and turned to a computer. No one said a word; no one moved. She raised her head and eyed everyone. "Is this the same Mansion House that the FBI asked for and received a protective order?"

Danielle answered. "Yes; your honor."

Her face softened a little. "It refers here to an Abby Metzler. Is that the same as Cindi Metzler? Did you have a formal name change?"

I became impressed the Judge had found all those records so fast.

Danielle responded. "Yes; your Honor; on both questions."

The Court asked if Danielle had prepared a temporary Order. He had. The Judge took her time reading it. I could see the top end of her pen wiggling as if she had taken to editing it. She handed it to one of the three Court employees near the high bench. "Here; make these changes; and return with a new one." All that happened quickly. The Court passed it around those Federal attorneys. "Sign it. Come back with proper Notice if you want to. Otherwise leave these people alone." As that paper made the rounds for signatures that Court asked me. "Do you know where the refugees are now?"

I answered. "No; your Honor. They departed in the night as I slept." I didn't say as they didn't ask that I suspected but did not know at that moment those immigrants had been taken to our motel at the next interchange.

Her face softened. "I see you quoted the opening of one of this country's

founding documents with 'we hold these truths to be self evident'. Using that is rare. Are you a law student or a constitutional scholar?"

"No; your honor. Those words came to me as I stood there under duress."

"Well done. Would the Clerk make copies for everyone of the endorsed order." They did. I walked out holding my copy in a tight death grip. My gut hurt and continued doing so until my sister-wives had me lying down in our quarters at the Mansion House.

That other truck Shannon had driven to our location needed major repairs. The State Police told us to go ahead. The owner's address didn't exist. We filed in the local Court to seize the truck for the repair expenses, and added it to our fleet.

One of our interns brought her African-American grandfather. Or maybe her great-grandfather. He had spent decades as a top chef in the nearest big city. He had quit when his wife became ill, and had stayed at her bedside as she slowly slipped away. All that weighed on him making him deeply depressed. She thought a little love from the Cap'n Jackie staff might help. Of course, he had no health insurance, no retirement, and their savings had been quickly spent on her medical care. Their African-American community helped with the finances, but that wasn't enough. Unknown to me the interns had collected donations for months from our employed staff. They all knew about GranPa Charlie without having seeing him.

She brought him to and into the kitchen for the love. He asked for a Chef's apron and hat. He grabbed a big knife and made one of his famous dishes of beef. Then pork. Then chicken. Fish. They made a one page flier for the menu of GranPa Charlie's special dishes. He loved it all, which had been the hoped for result. He exceeded expectations.

He heard the violinist in the restaurant following the Cap'n Jackie character around. He thought that interesting but a little over done. The violinist played a rendition of *Old Man River*.

GranPa Charlie asked for a clean apron. Without anyone's permission he moved his over weight self out of the kitchen. With the help of his grand-daughter he mounted the restaurant low stage. The grand-daughter went to the violinist. When she played the first bars of *Old Man River* again he sang the words. He had a magnificent baritone singing voice. Forks stopped in midair and rested on the plates. He had the admiring attention of the restaurant customers.

They summoned me. I stood with Barbie-Doll at the checkout counter.

He sang *We Shall Overcome*, and had customers joining in. He had them up and gyrating to *When The Saints Coming Marching In*.

What surprised me is that I didn't become angry with his intrusion. I envied his recovery and his voice. I became amazed at his psychological turn around.

He asked and someone from the floor suggested *Michael Row The Boat Ashore*. His grand-daughter noticed him swaying a little, and escorted him down and back to the kitchen to a standing ovation. GranPa Charlie became a nearly permanent flier in our menu. He sang anytime anyone would help him up on the low stage. A walker arrived for him as his weight and age became an ever increasing problem.

Later a big diesel locomotive had been parked where the gravel hoppers were usually left. Eddie called us. Both mainline railroads had dozens of those GE Dash 8 locomotives parked in the sun and out of service. They didn't know what to do with them; whether to scrap them, or upgrade in a rebuild. He suggested a charitable donation might be a best financial result. They had given us one to do whatever we could do with it.

The interns, jail work release men, and volunteers took it on. The sheet metal came off. The big diesel engine came apart and became upgraded for the new environmental standards. The traction motors had parts strewn everywhere. The main line provided specialty parts such as sleeves and rings for the pistons, and especially for the traction motors and their trucks.

Our people painted that locomotive the Blue Bayou Railroad standard royal blue. They made the identity Blue Bayou Two. Many loved the alliteration. They kicked the GE 44 Tonner engine number up a few when they painted it. They resisted calling the next locomotive Blue Bayou Three, and added a letter after the Two of A, then B, then C, and so on.

This engine restoration business kept growing. We would have two at a time. We had extra restored traction motor trucks stored in the back of the train shed. When there were seven parked outside lettered A through G, the main line asked to use them. They sent over a big lease form. Danielle struggled with that. I thought the lease rate had been set too high, but kept my big mouth shut. The Division Dispatcher called us for the first time our locomotives would be hauling a main line freight through our property. My heart and many others soared with pride when we saw those seven bright, gleaming, clean, royal blue, locomotives of ours leading a heavy freight train. Most of the jail work release men on graduation wanted jobs with us working on those locomotives. Eddie told us our cost structure for locomotive restoration became noticeably less than the main lines' cost structure. Our cost structure didn't pay Residents, interns, volunteers and very little to the jail work release men. No retirement. Medical care at the hospital had always been for free. The bank gave us another SBA loan for our locomotive leasing business.

The abused immigrants kept hiding with us. Nobody told me how Shannon, or somebody, had a State Police Trooper procure drivers licenses for them. Downright illegal as far as I know. With those drivers licenses they could qualify for commercial (CDL) drivers licenses. With everyone else suffering from a lack of commercial drivers, the immigrants helped us kept our big rig trucks rolling night and day. We built those immigrants a semi-high rise apartment house labeled in big blue letters 'Mansion House' on the other side of our ponds, and put in another train shed next to them. They held English classes there nearly every evening taught by our people. ICE never went back to Court.

We added a small billowing American flag beneath the railroad name and locomotive ID underneath the engineer's window. Below that in cursive writing were the words "we hold these truths to be self evident". That patriotism worked with the Judge, why not everyone else? Cedar Valley Trucking did the same on the doors of the trucks.

I became envious. If they rebuilt those big heavy locomotives, why couldn't I have surgery for rebuilding my voice to sound right in my feminine image?