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Drifting Dreams and Faraway Train Whistles

When I went to high school in Springfield, Oregon, twin brothers Ted and Leonard lived up Marcola Valley on a farm. I stayed with them overnight sometimes. They had taken a step toward independence from their family. They slept in a small building about a hundred feet away from the house, toward the barn. They kept the radio on low all night long, tuned to a station that played music, without much talking.

I drifted toward sleep. Soft music filled the darkness inside the room. The radio's dial glowed. Stars above the windows shone brightly. A train traveled up the valley in the early morning hours, on the other side of the river. I woke and listened to the whistle blowing at the crossing. I saw the radio dial glowing and heard the music still playing softly, and I drifted back into sleep.

Several of us stayed with Ted and Leonard one night when we drove up from town in Ted and Leonard's car. We stayed awake into the small hours of the morning, talking in the dark about everything that came to our minds.

We got up early, and as soon as it warmed up enough, we drove down and swam in the river. Midmorning, someone asked, "Where's Bob?"

"He was right here, on the big inner tube." We ran to the car, jumped in, drove to the bridge down the river, and got there in time to see Bob drifting toward us on the inner tube, sound asleep.

Leonard laughed and hollered. "Turn over, Bob! You're going to get sunburned all on one side!" Bob didn't wake up, so three of us jumped from the bridge, landed next to the big inner tube, and soaked Bob with gigantic splashes when we hit the water in "cannonball" form. That woke him up.

We all dried off enough to ride, tied the tube on top of the car, and drove back up to our favorite swimming hole. After that, we counted swimmers every little while, lest another who wasn't used to staying up late and getting up early drifted away from us, dozing on the river current.

I like where I live and what I'm doing now, in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado all these years later. Spreading memory over the years brings a pleasant feeling, as if I'm carrying all the

years, all the experiences with me all the time.

I leave the radio playing as I drift toward sleep in the cool mountain night. The dial light glows in the dark room. My big windows show me the slope rising south of the house, the forest of ponderosa pine standing dark against the lighter sky and, above the forest, brilliant stars. No railroad runs within forty miles, but as I drift into sleep, I think I hear a whistle blowing for the crossing, and trains from long ago clickety-clack through my dreams.