

# TRAIN Trap

*His dad felt there was still one section that needed some tweaking.*

*By Heather Voight, as told by Ken Voight*

Three weeks before Christmas, my mother dropped her strict tidiness rule in our Chicago home and allowed my younger brother, Don, and me to take over the living room with our Lionel train sets. I think it helped that Dad was almost as excited as we were to decide on the layout. Depending on the plan for the year's layout, Mom and Dad sometimes moved furniture to accommodate the trains.

For Christmas 1956, Dad decided to give Mom a bit of a break. He came up with the idea to save space by taking one wooden board, nailing the tracks to it, and attaching it to two V-shaped legs. Since I was taller than my brother, my train set ran on this board. Don's set lay beneath mine on a floorboard. The entire layout stood against the living-room wall, giving Mom some extra space to move around the room. I felt especially privileged that my layout included supports on the far side of the board that created a kind of bridge. Dad wasn't quite finished working out how or if the train would be able to climb the bridge, so I didn't play with that section right away.

Every day when my brother and I came home from school, we rushed to our train layouts. Our steam locomotives puffed realistic smoke from their stacks, which made Mom cough whenever she walked by. I loved putting on my blue-and-white-striped engineer's cap and slowly pulling back the lever that made the locomotive chug around the tracks.

One night when my brother and I were getting ready for bed, my dad decided to test my train bridge. Instead of trying to get the entire train to go up and down the steep tracks, he picked out one old freight car. He put the new bridge in place, pulled back the lever on the controls and waited.



Ken sitting beside his train layout, ready to play engineer.

The car climbed the tracks without much difficulty, but it got stuck on its way down. Unfortunately, the bridge stood at the far end of the board. Dad couldn't reach it unless he took the board off its supports.

If I had been in the living room, I would have been asked to help my dad remove it; it was an awkward job for one person. Thinking that he could spread his weight out if he crawled on the board, Dad inched his way toward the stranded train car on his hands and knees. Dad soon discovered that the board wasn't strong enough to hold a grown man.

Don and I were already in bed when we heard a loud *bam!* The board tilted, trapping Dad between the board and the wall. My brother rushed into the living room in his pajamas, and when he saw the board leaning on top of his layout, he cried, "Where's my train? Where is it?"

My father, still stuck behind the board, belted, "The heck with the train!"

As it turned out, my brother's train was not under the board when it toppled over. After Mom and I wrangled the board back in place, Dad also emerged unscathed. My brother didn't quite endear himself to Dad by asking about his train first instead of his father, though. ♦