

Rocket

by Steven Gowin

We boys shot BBs at the Rock Island Rocket.

The Chicago to Denver fast train clocked 90 MPH plus, but braked hard on the long curve through town, sparks ringing flanged wheels.

Sometimes we left pennies on the tracks for flattening. Sometimes it was big limestone rocks. We set ditch fires in the right of way too, burned creosote ties, schemed possible derailments from crowbars and tricycles left on the tracks, testing all for pandemonium.

But, on the Rocket's approach, as we faced the lead F-Unit, amped with hope and excitement, we clenched fists as if on a subway strap, and we yanked downward hard anticipating an engineer's mirrored pull on his horn's cord, a toot, as he passed. And engineers did toot.

We loved deconstruction, the promise of disaster, devastation, but we loved that god damned Rocket too.

A boy's relationship with trains is complicated.

