

Ron Gribler, MMR®: More than a Hobby

Ronald Lee Gribler was born March 31st, 1938 in Greenville, Ohio. He attended the University of Cincinnati where he studied Electrical Engineering and met Jean, his wife and my grandmother. He had four children, eight grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren (and counting). He worked for BF Goodrich, Texas Instruments, Lucas Industries, Ethicon, and more. He was an Elder and Trustee in local Presbyterian churches and was an active member of the Cincinnati Division 7 of the National Model Railroad Association (NMRA). Over the past few weeks, I have reflected on my relationship with my granddad and his with me. It is a story that is not simple, and one that he would likely not tell.

My name is Chris Shackleton and I am the youngest of Ron and Jean's grandchildren. Ron attempted to infect each of his grandsons with this wonderful obsession that we all share. Train sets for Christmas, trips to the Lebanon Mason & Monroe Railroad and Union Terminal, and countless hours spent entranced by his 6'x6' Post-War Lionel layout. I am not sure if he or I knew it then, but he got me. I was hooked forever.

Unfortunately, actions and circumstances outside of either of our control separated us, and we lost touch. I would see him and our family less and less as I grew up. Every week would turn into once a month, to once a year, to not at all. However, that seed that had been planted when I was a child suddenly sprouted when I was 18. In early 2017, I bought a Bachmann HO starter set and that was that. March 11th, 2017 was the day we reconnected. It was the annual NMRA Division 7 spring swap meet. It had been at least 5 years since I had last seen him. I saw him, went up to him and said hi. He bought me a hot dog and introduced me to some of his friends. And just like that, we were back in each other's lives.

I spent many afternoons and evenings in his basement, at his workshop and layout. We would sometimes work on my things, sometimes his. Sometimes we spoke a lot and got little work done, sometimes we spoke less and got a lot done. We could have an O-Scale structure assembled and painted in an evening. We were a team. He was a constant source of advice and wisdom, whether it concerned trains or life. I would come to him struggling with the track plan for my layout, and he would produce 10 magazines with relevant articles for me to take home for inspiration.

My granddad was an incredibly modest man. He was a world-class scale modeler (and MMR #494), but he would never let on when you spoke to him. His work is testament to that. Dozens of scratch-built and kit-bashed locomotives, cars and structures, but not least of all, his layout.

He modeled the Big Three railroads as they were in and around his hometown of Greenville, Ohio. It consists of three decks. The top is the Pennsylvania Railroad, the middle the Baltimore and Ohio's Dayton & Union branch, and the bottom the New York Central. It is a 2-rail O Scale layout operated with an MRC DCC system. This short description does not do it justice.

This hobby is special to each and every one of us for different reasons. To me, it represents the connection that I have with my granddad and family. It was the bridge that reconnected me with him, and through him my family. I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have known and to have loved my granddad.

Some people are golfers, some people fish, some people don't do anything. My granddad and I are Model Railroaders.

I plan to be active in the NMRA and pursue my MMR. I currently model the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1965 in HO. I am working on documenting Ron's layout and other works. Whether Ron has touched your life or not, if you see me at a Division 7 event or otherwise, please feel free to come and speak with me.