Jerry Glasco Interview Transcript

INTERVIEWER: Could you please state your name and affiliation with the Railway Mail Service?
Jerry Glasco: Jerry Glasco. I was a railway mail clerk for the Illinois Central, Chicago to Memphis train lines.
INTERVIEWER: Were you a regular or a sub?
Jerry Glasco: I started out as a sub. I subbed for about two, two and a half years and then I made regular after that.
INTERVIEWER: Earlier you mentioned the rail lines that you worked on; could you tell me some of the locations you traveled between?
Jerry Glasco: Chicago and Memphis, of course Chicago and Carbondale, Carbondale being about halfway in between those two. Carbondale to St. Louis was the main ones that I traveled on. I made very few other runs.
INTERVIEWER: How long did you serve as a Railway Post Office clerk?
Jerry Glasco: From March 29, 1958 until the fall of ’67. I’m not exactly sure of the date that I went into the post office.
INTERVIEWER: Why did you want to become a Railway Post Office clerk?
Jerry Glasco: Well, in the beginning, it’s just -- one of the fellows who came into the business that I worked at said, you know, we’re giving a test for this. This is a lifetime job. As long as the United States flies the flag, you have a job with the post office. It sounded like a good deal. It was considerably more money than what I was making at that time and it sounded like a good advancement for me.
INTERVIEWER: What were you doing before?
Jerry Glasco: Food store, grocery store.
INTERVIEWER: What types of jobs did you have on the railcars?
Jerry Glasco: I sorted mail, sorted letters for different states. We sorted newspapers, did the nonstop local on the trains. I filled all the positions at one time or another except the supervisor position because I was a substitute.
INTERVIEWER: For any one of the jobs that you worked, could you describe a typical day on the railcars, starting from when you first went in until you got off at the end of the road?
Jerry Glasco: On my main run which was Chicago to Carbondale, we started in the afternoon about 5:30, got on, worked the mail all the way down to the state until we got to Carbondale which was around two o’clock in the morning and then I laid over in Carbondale for about 20 hours, and I got back on another train and worked all the way back to Chicago doing exactly the same thing, working different state mail, doing nonstop local on some of the jobs and just different things.
INTERVIEWER: What was your schedule like?
Jerry Glasco: My regular schedule was a six, two, four, and nine. I worked six days on, two days off, four days on, and nine days off.
INTERVIEWER: Was there any one position that you liked working the most on the railcars?
Jerry Glasco: Well, I don’t think I had any one that I liked better than the others. When I was subbing I liked the Chicago to Memphis run because we had a 20-hour layover in Memphis before we started back and it gave us time to relax and enjoy some of the sights around Memphis and whatnot.
INTERVIEWER: What type of railcar did you work on?
Jerry Glasco: I worked on the 60-foot railcar. The entire car was postal service. I guess when I was subbing I probably worked on one of the 30-footers which was half mail car and half baggage car but most of my running was on the full-size car where we had the letter cases, pouches for the first class mail, sacks for newspapers and whatnot in storage.
INTERVIEWER: Did you ever run on one of the 15-foot cars?
Jerry Glasco: No, ma’am. No.
INTERVIEWER: When you worked on the railways, do you remember what you’re starting salary was?
Jerry Glasco: I started $1.99 an hour.
INTERVIEWER: What about your ending salary for the railroad?
Jerry Glasco: I don’t really remember that. I know it went up, you know, progressed quite a bit but I don’t remember exactly.
INTERVIEWER: From what you do remember about the pay, do you believe that it was fair for the amount of work that you had to do?
Jerry Glasco: Oh, yes, I do. We worked a six-hour-and-25-minute day on actually on the train and that was considered eight hours because we had a lot of work that we did at home before we went to work to prepare our labels and facing slips. Any schemes we had to keep up had to be kept up daily and things like that. So, yes, I think it was very fair.
INTERVIEWER: I know that you said that you got into the post office because it was paying significantly more than your previous job. Do you remember how big of a difference it was?
Jerry Glasco: A $1.25 to $1.99 per hour.
INTERVIEWER: What did you typically carry with you in your grip while you were on trips?
Jerry Glasco: I carried my work clothes, schemes, schedules, snack, my revolver. That would pretty well cover it. I guess I carried six schemes and schedules with me that I kept up because I had six different states of mail that I worked one way or the other.
INTERVIEWER: Do you remember what the longest trip you ever worked was?
Jerry Glasco: Well, the longest regular trip would have been the Chicago to Memphis run. We started around 5:00 in the morning and got in to Memphis at 5:00 in the afternoon but there were times of course when there were delays. I don’t remember the exact -- I remember getting a certificate of appreciation for we didn’t get into Chicago from the Memphis run until it was time to go back to work the next morning, so that would have probably been about 17 hours or something like that.
INTERVIEWER: That’s a long time to work.
Jerry Glasco: Yes. But it was enjoyable and, of course, we always had enough work to keep us busy. But everyone worked together and we got caught up, we could sit and talk for five or 10 minutes or so before we got to the next stop and you didn’t have to stand on your feet constantly. We got some breaks in there.
INTERVIEWER: While you were working as a Railway Post Office clerk, did you have a family?
Jerry Glasco: Yes.
INTERVIEWER: How did you cope with leaving your family behind on long trips?
Jerry Glasco: Well, it was just -- that was the job. That was what you had to do. By living in Carbondale or around Carbondale, on my Chicago to Memphis runs, my wife would meet the train and bring me clean clothes and bring me another lunch and whatnot. So actually, I saw her everyday but it was maybe for five minutes at a time or less. Then when the boys came along it was just with my layoffs we had plenty of time to do a lot of things. I spent a lot of time with them on my nine-day layoff and being home every other day for 20 hours was -- I wasn’t away that much on that particular run.
INTERVIEWER: How did your family take your position?
Jerry Glasco: They did well. They enjoyed the stories that we told and things and my wife would ride the train to Memphis. Before we had the children she would ride the train from Carbondale to Memphis and we’d have that time to spend together down there. Then, of course, she rode back to Carbondale. They accepted it very well.
INTERVIEWER: What were some of the things that they did while you were away?
Jerry Glasco: Everything that a family did. I mean the boys played ball and there were school activities and whatnot. Just what a regular family would do.
INTERVIEWER: What are some of your fondest memories of working on the railroad?
Jerry Glasco: The people I worked with; of course, we all became very good friends and the time we spent together was close because we were all compacted in the car. Any particular events, I don’t really remember anything in particular but every run seemed to be enjoyable even at Christmastime when the mail would be so heavy. Still, we had enough help to get things done and enjoy our work.
INTERVIEWER: Do you still keep in touch with any of the former clerks?
Jerry Glasco: A few of them, there aren’t very many of us left. In our area I think there’s about eight or nine that we’d get together once a year for lunch and there are a couple who live here in Carbondale that we don’t visit but we see each other periodically.

INTERVIEWER: Did the post office ever issue you anything for your safety or for the position?
Jerry Glasco: They supply the goggles and things that we needed when we were doing the local nonstop dispatches. They supplied anything that we needed to do the job well. As far as safety shoes or something like that we provided those ourselves. It wasn’t something the post office provided.

INTERVIEWER: What type of supplies did they provide so that way you guys could do the job well?
Jerry Glasco: Whatever we needed. There wasn’t a whole lot of things that you didn’t -- you needed a knife to cut the packages open, which was a ring knife type thing. They supplied that. They supplied any of the materials that you needed to put on the pouches or packages of mail to identify them, register supplies, anything that was needed they supplied it. We didn’t have to go out and buy anything on our own.

INTERVIEWER: Were there ever times where you experienced a dangerous or bad situation on the railway?
Jerry Glasco: No, I can’t remember one. We never -- I was fortunate enough. We never had a wreck while I was on the trains. We’ve been stopped because there were wrecks ahead of us but I never had a bad experience like that. No one trying to steal the money or anything, it was pretty regular.

INTERVIEWER: Did the train ever hit cars that were trying to --?
Jerry Glasco: No, not while I was on them. No.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever hear of anybody who did experience a dangerous or bad situation like any stories of people who got into train accidents?
Jerry Glasco: No, I don’t remember anything like that. I don’t remember any accidents that involved any of our people getting hurt or anything.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever face or witness any type of racial discrimination as a Railway Post Office clerk?
Jerry Glasco: No, and we had all classed and all kinds of people working out there. No, there was no discrimination that I ever saw.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever hear of anybody who did experience racial discrimination on the railcars?
Jerry Glasco: No.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you think that there wasn’t any type of discrimination?
Jerry Glasco: Well, I don’t know. The era that we were going through there wasn’t, that wasn’t a big thing, and the post office was just very fair. I mean, if you could do the job and there was an opening for you, then you got it.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Were you a member of any type of outside organization such as a union or club that was affiliated with the railway postal clerks?
Jerry Glasco: No.

INTERVIEWER: Was there anything that you ever wanted to change about your position?
Jerry Glasco: Air conditioning would have been nice in the summertime but other than that - no. The working conditions were as good as what we could expect for the job that we were doing.

INTERVIEWER: What do you miss the most about being a Railway Post Office clerk?
Jerry Glasco: The time spent with fellow workers and knowing that we were doing a job that no one else could do as well as what we were doing. The Railway Mail Service could deliver a package or a letter from one town to the next town in less than five minutes and that’s a service that you don’t see any more.

INTERVIEWER: Is there anything else that you miss about that position?
Jerry Glasco: Having the extra time, working the long hours and then having the time off. That was one of the best benefits.

INTERVIEWER: Then for the last question, is there any other information that you would like to share with researchers about your experience or position with the railway Post Office and this could be anything from a funny story to some of the interesting things that you saw?
Jerry Glasco: No, I don’t really have anything like that to share. It was pretty much a regular day by day job and nothing spectacular. While I was still subbing, I guess one of the outstanding things was that I ended up working 32 days in a row to Memphis and back from Chicago to Memphis and I was filling in for indefinite positions while the guys were all sick, or for some reason or another. That’s probably the most memorable thing that I have.

INTERVIEWER: Was there anything interesting that you saw in the registered mail?
Jerry Glasco: No, we never knew what was in it. Before I went on the railway mail, I worked at the Midway Airport there in Chicago during my trainings and I was in the registered section and the Hope Diamond came through our registered section while I was there many, many years ago.

INTERVIEWER: Wow! What were some of the interesting sights that you saw while on the train or on layovers from your job?

Jerry Glasco: The Cotton Carnival in Memphis was always interesting, if you happen to be down there at the right time for those. You didn’t see much outside unless you were doing the nonstop local. You were pretty well in the car and doing your work. I can’t think of anything else. It was all interesting.

INTERVIEWER: What about some of the sights that you saw while you were exploring Memphis?

Jerry Glasco: It wasn’t that way. Memphis was altogether a different place from what it is now. You could walk the streets at midnight and not be concerned about anything, being bothered or anything else. It was a super nice town to be in. I never saw any demonstrations or any fights or anything like that.

INTERVIEWER: Is there anything else that you remember about your position that you would like to say?

Jerry Glasco: No, that’s pretty well it. That’s been a long time ago and I don’t remember anything specific.