

Riding the Rails

The year is 1933, and you live in a rural town called Front Royal, Virginia. Today is your 18th birthday, but you aren't in much of a celebratory mood because you are about to make a tough decision.

The Great Depression has caused many hardships for the people of Front Royal. Your father works at a milling company, but his pay has been reduced, and he earns just two dollars per week. You have not had any luck finding a job for yourself.

Two years ago, your older brother left home on his 18th birthday to "ride the rails." He lives the life of a hobo: sneaking onto freight trains, and trying to find farm work in places like Tennessee and Georgia. Occasionally he mails a letter home with stories of his travels. Recently, he said that work was hard to come by in Tennessee, and he was feeling quite low. He was thinking about riding a train to Charleston, South Carolina, to look for work on a fishing boat.

Your brother's adventures sound dangerous, but there is a certain appeal that you can't deny. As a teenager yourself, you are ready to be treated like an adult, and "riding the rails" would be your first taste of freedom.

A week before your 18th birthday, you make up your mind to meet your brother in Charleston. You don't have enough money for a train ticket, so you'll have to ride the rails. Your parents wish you would stay, but they understand that you are ready to live independently.

Last night, the day before your birthday, a man from the government came to your house. He was a representative from the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a new government agency designed to help young, unemployed men. The CCC just opened its first camp in a nearby town called Luray, and they are recruiting local men between the ages of 18 and 25. The man from the CCC said that you can come work at the camp once you turn 18.

He said there would be three meals a day, and you would get paid \$30 a month. However, reserve officers from the Army are in charge of the camp, so the rules are quite strict. This changes everything! You were all set to embark on a great adventure and now you have to make a choice. Will you try to meet your brother in Charleston? Or will you go the CCC camp, where the rules are strict, but the food and pay are guaranteed?

