

James "Jim" R. Pearce
Railroader from 1948 to 1994

Background:

James "Jim" Richard Pearce was born in Durango, Colorado, on August 24, 1929. His parents were James Arthur and Kathleen Brice Pearce. Jim's siblings, Lillian Martin, William "Bill" Pearce, and Joanne Brennan also were born and resided in Durango. His brother Joseph passed away in childhood. Jim and his family were devout Catholics. He was an altar boy at St. Columba Catholic Church from 3rd grade through high school. Jim worked as soon as he was able and at 13 years old, he pulled the hand elevator at Mercy Hospital and ran errands. In high school, he worked at Brennan's Service Station, managed sports teams, and acted in high school plays. He graduated from Durango High School in 1948 and attended Fort Lewis Junior College for one year. Jim married Vivian Love and had four children. The Pearce family moved several times for Jim's career and transfers. Jim passed away on November 14, 2014, in Alamosa.

Career:

Jim Pearce was employed by the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad and its subsequent merged companies, the Southern Pacific (SP/D&RGW RR) and Union Pacific (UP/D&RGW RR). His career spanned 45 years. Jim's grandfather, Joseph Brice, started his career with the D&RGW in Durango in 1901 as a fireman and engineer. Joe retired in 1948, two months before Jim started his career. Jim was hired in September of 1948 as a fireman, was promoted to engineer, and eventually Roadforeman of Equipment-Assistant Trainmaster. He retired on January 1, 1994.

Throughout his career, Jim was transferred from Durango to Alamosa, Pueblo, Salida, and back to Alamosa. Below is a brief timeline of his career.

- 1948-1961 Fireman and Engineer - Durango. Silverton Branch and Chama/Alamosa Branch. (took 1 year off and served in the Korean War and was honorably discharged)
- 1961-1970 Engineer and Roadforeman of Equipment-Assistant Trainmaster - Alamosa. Chama/Alamosa and the mainline throughout Colorado.
- 1970-1971 Roadforeman of Equipment-Assistant Trainmaster - Pueblo. Mainline throughout Colorado.
- 1971-1974 Roadforeman of Equipment - Assistant Trainmaster - Salida. Mainline throughout Colorado.
- 1974-1994 Engineer - Alamosa. LaVeta Turn, Creede Branch, Monte Vista Branch, Antonito Local.

Jim's career spanned the years when the narrow gauge-steam locomotive industry was eventually phased out as a transportation source for freight, predominantly lumber and coal, and the newer, more efficient standard gauge-diesel locomotives became the industry's workhorses. Steam locomotives ran on narrow gauge tracks and were eventually relegated to tourist train routes that ran and are currently running from Durango to Silverton and Chama to Antonito in Colorado.

Jim spent summers (1966-1970) in Durango as an engineer for the Durango-Silverton Branch, popular with tourists. As his career demanded him to be on the D&RGW mainline, Jim eventually gave up his summer job. Jim returned for a month in 1968 to oversee the use of the D&RGW trackage and equipment on Cumbres Pass (between Chama, NM and Antonito, CO) for the movie "The Good Guys and the Bad Guys". He did not, however, serve as a locomotive engineer for the CATS (Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Railway) once it was sold for use as a short line tourist train operation.

Throughout his career, Jim worked on several train derailments, train accidents, and snowstorms that trapped entire freight trains. He traveled constantly to and from whichever town was his home base whenever he wasn't working. In 1974, he experienced a heart attack as he began a train run from Walsenburg, Colorado, to Pueblo, Colorado. Months later when cleared to return to work, Jim was "restricted to the Yard Limit", which meant he could engineer any of the "turns" or "branches" out of Alamosa. Though he was eventually cleared to return to work as an engineer on the mainline and because he had the highest seniority; after carefully considering this option, he decided against that career move. Having moved his family three times in five years, dealt with the growing pains of a competitive railroad freight company, and experienced a major health episode, Jim decided that the San Luis Valley, aka the Yard Limit, was where he'd stay and eventually retire from his career on January 1st, 1994.