

Trevor & the model trains

There are at least two words our kindergarten can spell. The first is his name, Trevor. The second is the word "train."

So it was no surprise when he jumped up in his booster seat and pointed to the sign with the bright red "train" word on it. Thorncreek United Methodist Church, which sits on the edge of Jefferson Township on Rockdale Road, was advertising a free model train display.

Before I share the wonderful visit we had at Thorncreek, let me add some context to our experience.

You see, our son was named after a green traction engine. My wife and I had been given the difficult news that our unborn son would be born blue with other complications. On the way to the hospital we were so upset about all that could happen, that we still didn't have a name for our son.

We turned to our two angelic daughters sitting in the back seat for divine inspiration and they insisted that their baby brother be named after one of the Thomas the Train characters. As much as we tried to gently guide them with biblical name suggestions, the only one that would do was Trevor, as in Trevor the Traction Engine. My wife and I looked at each other too anxious with what would happen to be disagreeable. We just figured it was meant to be.

However, there was one problematic issue that I hastily Googled on the way into the hospital. There was no St. Trevor in the list of Catholic names. I went to the nun who performed Trevor's emergency baptism in the hospital and asked how this name could somehow work.



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She told me that at least the middle name had to be a name of a saint. Fortunately "James" was the bright red engine whose name the girls suggested would do nicely. So I guess you could say that model trains had a history with Trevor before he was even born.

Getting back to Thorncreek, we had taken Trevor to the Western Pennsylvania Model Railroad Museum in Richland each year since he was six months old. I thought that perhaps this model train experience might be a disappointment because this small church certainly couldn't begin to compare with that tremendous exhibit.

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I don't know too much about model trains, but I recognized the old Lionel set on the Christmas display. My great-uncle had passed on to me one just like it when I was Trevor's age. It was exactly how I remembered it.

"Wow, I can't believe something like this still works," was the first thing I thought to myself.

Next we walked over to the Fourth of July display. There were little wisps of smoke coming out of the switch tower. The smell brought back memories. I remember as a kid putting something inside the engine trains to make the same kind of smoke.

And then before I knew it, I was a 5-year-old all over again. My son and I skipped over to the circus display. The lion tamer was being chased by the lion on the train.

"Hey, I think I had that," I shouted to Trevor. He was too engaged with the Batman cars and the pirate ship to hear what I was saying.

They say the best things in life are free and sometimes unexpected. Our Thorncreek visit certainly was one of those.

The highly detailed displays were the work of the Rev. Kurt Knobel, the church's pastor for the last three years. He said that he had been collecting model trains for more than 30 years. This was the first time Thorncreek had opened this to the public and here's hoping they do it for years to come.

As we left the building, Trevor pointed up and asked me what the words above the door said. I told him it said, "You are now entering the mission field."

He asked me what that meant. I said, "Well, St. Trevor, it means you should tell your friends in kindergarten what you saw today at Thorncreek." He smiled, and the last one to the car was a rotten egg.

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