

February 9, 2015

Dear Geri –

Thank you so much for taking the time to address this issue. I'm sure you've gotten an earful on the Metro North disaster on Tuesday from concerned constituents. I was on the train Tuesday evening. It was a very horrific experience. Those poor people.

I have been a commuter from North Salem / Purdy's station for over 25 years and the service and travel time have gotten progressively worse. I am generally late for work at least 2-3 mornings a week due to delays.

Until recently, the 5:44 pm has been my regular train. I've just accepted a full time position at Estee Lauder and as a result my travel time fluctuates. I happened to have been on the 5:44 on Tuesday evening. I always sit in the same seat – at the rear of the 3<sup>rd</sup> car as it lets you out close to the stairway at Purdy's.

The train was going at a normal speed and about 6:20 it stopped abruptly – lurched forward and stopped again. The power shut off – other than the lights - which remained on. I commented to the gentleman sitting next to me “that doesn't sound good.”

Within 5 minutes an announcement was made that we had hit a car and we were told to remain in our seats. Having been on a train in the past that had hit a car – I made nothing of it. Usually we are delayed for a period time while the accident is attended to and then the train is backed up to the closest station and we get on a replacement train. I called my husband and told him that I would be late. Everyone was perfectly calm – as I said – this has happened before.

Several minutes later a conductor / or officer (not sure) came through the car asking if there were any injuries. He seemed pretty uptight and I thought it was odd given that the train didn't stop with the type of impact that would have caused an injury. Again we sat for a period of time and then passengers from the car ahead of us started coming through the aisles telling us to move back in the train. They did not seem particularly stressed so we waited and finally the people in my vicinity got up and we calmly moved back.

When we reached to the back of the 6<sup>th</sup> car, I saw a friend I hadn't seen in a while and sat with her. Everyone was still calm and making normal conversation. We discussed our jobs and the Super Bowl – again totally unaware of what was happening in the front of the train. I called my husband and said I didn't know what was going on but would keep him posted.

Obviously we could see that there were lots of fire trucks and police units but it seemed perfectly normal given the train had hit a car.

Eventually we heard voices on the left side of the train (if you were facing forward) telling us to get off the train. Someone said it was a bunch of punk kids. One guy opened the car door facing the southbound tracks and a fireman quickly told him to shut the door and stay inside.

A few minutes later, someone (a passenger?) said we need to evacuate the train – we still had no idea what was going on - and they opened the door near where we were sitting on the side of the tracks where the voices were coming from. It was determined that the ledge there was too narrow to jump so they closed the door and the door at the front of the car was opened. Someone instructed us to walk to that door and jump. It was about a 5 or 6 foot drop at that point. Two men – who I assumed were first responders – assured us they would catch us and so one by one the entire car jumped into their arms. I later learned they were passengers who evacuated the car.

After we jumped – we could see billowing smoke from the front of the train and assumed the car was on fire. The snow was pretty deep and we made our way single file along the side of the train. The path was quite narrow and dropped off into the river below. It had become icy with all the foot traffic and we were leaning towards the train so as not to slip. It's a miracle that someone didn't fall into the river below us. Everyone was still calm. We walked south just past the end of the train to the next intersection (almost a mile?) – walked across the tracks – again guided by other passengers and then began to walk north. Still no emergency responders!

It was then we could see that the train was on fire and heard an explosion. A few hundred people gathered in what seemed like a parking lot – although I am not sure where we were exactly. There was no one in an official capacity checking to see if everyone was okay or providing any information or helping us figure out what to do.

I started talking to a guy who told me he was in the second car and that the third rail had gone through the car floor and there were casualties. He said that he and some other passengers tried to open the door to help rescue people and at first they couldn't get it open and when they did open it – it was too late. The fire had consumed the car – he did say – he would never forget what he saw.

Pretty soon 2 women started talking to the group and they said they were from the rocking climbing gym just above us and that people should come up to stay warm and use the bathrooms.

Other passengers said they were going to walk north to Hawthorne train station as it would be easier to be picked up. My friend, another young women and I joined them and we walked almost 2 miles. I heard someone say there was a bar named Gordo's just past the train station – he was giving someone on his cell the address so I called my husband and told him to pick us up there. He was able to reach us by 9:00.

We really must do something about this rail system. It's a disgrace that in the New York metropolitan area the primary commuter railroad is so archaic and dangerous. And while the fire and police were justifiably focused on the horror in the front of the train, the remainder of the train was uninformed, unattended to and self-evacuated. There was no plan on Metro North's end and fortunately there were no additional injuries.

In addition, my husband and I had dinner with some friends who are members of the Croton Falls (North Salem) fire department. They told us – that first responders are given no training in train accidents – despite the fact that many communities are in such close proximity to the stations. This is unacceptable as well.

Robin Albin



Home: [redacted]