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The Train Ride

Nancy L. Ross

When my grandson was 5 he had an imaginary friend named Joe who was a fireman.

Ryan carried on complete (but one sided) conversations with Joe. There was no doubt he was real to him.

One day I asked Ryan if he would like to take a train ride into Chicago and go to the Museum of Science and Industry. Along with fire trucks, trains fascinated him. He asked Joe if he wanted to go, then he answered me, "When?" We decided to go the next day.

We boarded the Chicago bound Burlington Northern commuter train at the Lisle, Illinois station. After we took our seats Ryan stood and looked around the car and was extremely interested in the seating available on the second floor. He could see people sitting up there through the railings that ran down both sides above our heads.

As the train moved toward the city we watched out the windows peering into the manicured backyards of the large Downers Grove homes and Western Springs mansions. Riding through LaGrange we saw its stately homes. Soon we saw Brookfield's modest brick houses before passing the Hollywood/Brookfield Zoo stop. After the forest preserve and Salt Creek we saw the large brick mansions and parks of Riverside. Berwyn came next with its little brick bungalows and Czech bakeries. Then after the three-flats and German restaurants of Berwyn rushed by we saw parking lots, junk piles of countless businesses, the rail container transfer yard, and lumber piles behind a home improvement store as we speeded through Cicero. Crossing Cicero Avenue into Chicago we watched apartments, the tenements of the ghetto, and the tall office buildings of the west loop go by. Finally we went through the rail switching yard before we entered the black above ground tunnel of Union Station.

When we exited at the station we walked down the long, dark, cold cement platform into the brightly lit terminal, across the marble hall to the taxi stand and got into the cab at the front of the line. As we

rode through the city toward the lakefront, Ryan excitedly took in the tall buildings, cars, buses, and people on the street. Traveling down Lake Shore Drive, he craned his neck to watch the sailboats on Lake Michigan and spotted a ship out in the distance.

The first thing we saw in the museum was the huge train display in the entrance hall. This is a display of scale trains with several separate tracks and different types of trains, all going around at the same time, in different directions, at different speeds. There are miniature train switching yards with cranes to lift the empty container cars. There are train stations and switching stations, fueling yards, coal yards, businesses, and lumber yards. The trains go over mountains, into cities, across rivers and gorges, and through prairies. Ryan excitedly ran from one vantage point to another for about 40 minutes.

We left the great hall and wandered through the corridors stopping to look at displays that interested him until we became hungry. Then we went down to the basement where there is a McDonald's. As we got to a table with our meals, Ryan sat at the end, I put down our tray and sat down-and Ryan yelled, "Gamma, you're sitting on Joe!" I jumped up. Surprised and embarrassed, I mumbled an apology to Joe, and sat down on the other side of the table. Meanwhile Ryan was explaining to Joe that I didn't know any better.

When we arrived at the station for our return trip home, Ryan asked if he could sit in a seat on the second floor. I decided he would be safe by himself, since I could see the seats and he couldn't come down the steps without my seeing him walking down the aisle. After we passed the Downers Grove station, I stood and called to Ryan that he should come downstairs because we would get off at the next station. He said, "OK, Gamma." Then he leaned across the rail, looking toward the other side, and yelled, "Joe, we get off at the next station." I noticed several people watching him, and as he called out they all looked to the other side of the car to see who Joe was.