

The Awfully Great Big Chu Chu Train

Bay Area Parent
1984

by Laura Bernell

It was a grouchy morning. I had lower back pain and tension in my neck. David and Aaron ate oatmeal and got it all over the floor. Their whining—in unison—hit never before known heights of sound. The only excursion I felt like taking was a long one far away—and all alone.

Somehow I got us and my knapsack loaded into the car. I tried to remember where I was going. The San Jose train station. Where the heck's the train station? 280 South came to mind. 280 South to what? David and Aaron were squealing in the backseat. I screamed. *STOP SQUEALING. I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ONE MORE SOUND OR YOU WILL NEVER GO ON A TRAIN RIDE IN YOUR LIFE! GOT IT?* 280 South to what? A red, white, and blue AMTRAK sign appeared: AMTRAK, NEXT RIGHT. Great. We just might get there. Get off on Bird. Bird to what? Another red, white and blue sign. To San Fernando. Left on San Fernando. Now what?

We were there. I immediately loved this real, old-fashioned train station. Later, David and Aaron sleeping in the car on the way back home from our excursion, I realized: getting to the San Jose train station was easy. Parking was easy. Buying tickets was easy. Riding the train was relaxing. Watching David and Aaron's errant energy transformed into glee and wonder was therapeutic. We had gotten off at the Palo Alto station, a 29 minute ride, and gone down the wonderful underground tunnel under the tracks to the other side. There were graffiti and children's murals on the tunnel walls. We waited a pleasant twenty minutes and took the train back home. I think we'll do it again some grouchy day not too far away.

But so much for mom. Here's how the train ride was from the point of view of two little kids:



Aaron (1) + David 1984

by Laura Bernell

(with a lot of help from David and Aaron)

Chug-a chug-a chug-a chug.
Toooooooooooooohoooooot. Ding ding ding.
The awf'ly great big chu chu train*
Is an awf'ly happy thing.
There's an awf'ly real long tunner-ramp
For running down and through.
My feet are flying ahead of me.
I think they'll stop. Do you?
Giant silver sliding doors,
A windstorm at my knees!
Hsshhh! The silver doors slide open.
Hsshh. Don't close yet, please!
We climb upstairs, We're up real high.
The track's way down below.
Us moving now! Us moving, see?*I hear the whistle blow.
Someone punches a hole in my ticket.
Why did him do that?*He smiles and he winks at me.
I'd like to wear his hat*

The train moves down the track real fast
I'm jiggling from side to side.
I'm moving in two ways at once.
Oh boy, what a ride!

Look. Oh look. We're going this way*
And far away from the other.
How in the world will we ever get back?
I better ask my mother!

The man with the hat sings a funny song
And then he walks away.
Pal-lo-al-to Pal-lo-al-to.
Mom, what him did say?*

The big train screeches awf'ly loud,
And tries to knock me down!*Watch your step, my mother says,
And helps me to the ground.

Hsshhh and clank and metal and steel.
ALL-LA-BEARD, the brakeman sings.
Awf'ly great big chu chu trains*
Are awf'ly happy things.

*Starred lines are direct quotes from David and Aaron.

NOTE: The second Palo Alto stop is really nice, if only for the underground tunnel and its murals. Go out the station and you'll see a sign, MACARTHUR PARK. It is not a park; it's a pretty fancy restaurant. If you'd like to stop at a park, get off at the California Street stop, just before the Palo Alto stop. Go the other way and there's a green expanse of lawn. Nice for a picnic. Turn east out of the station and there's the Bagel Works, a real bagel factory. "We produce five million bagels a year!" They use the old-fashioned baking boards and float the bagels in water. No tours Saturday or Sunday. Call for a tour: (415) 323-4887. Ask for Mike or Mark. For a longer walk from this station, try heading for Stanford University or Stanford Shopping Center. Ask for directions at the depot. For Southern Pacific CalTrain general information and reservations call 280-6992.

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