

TRANSPORTING CHILDREN ON THE TRAIN

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University of Wisconsin junior Joan Lin has always spent her free time caring for people, from babysitting to volunteering at a home for the elderly. As a nursing major and a Chinese-American, she thought an internship with China Care would be the perfect fit. She entered China Care's 2008 program hoping to learn "how to better advocate for children with no one to help them." While in China, Lin witnessed first-hand the challenges of the people who do help when she traveled with an ayi, or caregiver, and two China Care infants between Baoji and Beijing on a train. The children, who were being cared for by China Care in Baoji, needed medical treatment in Beijing. She describes her experience transporting the children in the following story.



The ayi and I squeezed onto the train with the two young children, an older woman, a large suitcase and other baby supplies. I carried Shuang, who suffered from an eye tumor, and the ayi took care of Wen, whose hands and legs were malformed. The train was a soft sleeper, with four beds in each compartment, two on top and two on bottom. We had purchased tickets for the upper level because the lower level bunks were sold out, but hoped that some compassionate passengers would switch with us for the sake of the infants. We even offered to pay the difference in price since the bottom beds cost more. We explained the difficulty of changing diapers, feeding the children, and soothing them throughout the night, but no one offered. Even when told these were children who had



been abandoned and suffered from illnesses, not one person in that car offered to exchange beds with us. Fortunately, the conductor allowed us to move to another car so that we could have two lower beds in the same compartment.

Settling down for the night, the ayi and I put the babies to sleep and arranged the blankets around them as a barrier. We

ourselves formed a second barrier using our bodies to keep the rolling babies on the narrow beds. We slept when they slept, woke when they stirred and quieted them if they woke. We arrived at ten in the morning and were met by China Care staff who took us to the Children's Home where we handed the children over to the team who would take care of their medical needs and shower them with love and affection.

I learned a lot from this experience. I learned that it is a tremendous responsibility to take care of a child while traveling on a train, especially a child who in addition to regular cleaning, feeding and looking after, needs to be given medications or have surgical wounds cleaned. I learned that if the child does not fuss or keep you up all night, it is easy to love that child, but if the child keeps you and other passengers up all night, it could be harder to summon up the same fond feelings for that child. On both trips on the train, to Baoji and back, I witnessed the attentive care that the ayis gave these children. Experiencing it myself made me appreciate the ayis' work even more. The ayis care deeply for these children and are an amazing part of China Care.