

## The Best Train Ride

*by Kenita Gibbins*

In 1944 I got to take my first ride on a train from Oklahoma City to San Francisco. My mother had made a previous trip to see my father without me. I'm sure she knew Daddy's little girl really missed him. I was four going on five. I had no idea why my Daddy came to San Francisco in a big ship.

The boarding onto the train was difficult. Mother had only one suitcase for the two of us, but the amount of people scared me. She found our seats and told me I had to stay put. The excitement made me tired so I just went to sleep. We had homemade sandwiches when I woke up. I asked permission to walk up and down the aisle of our train car, I think at age four going on five I was pretty cute. I'm sure I was just as friendly then as I am now. People started asking me where I was going. "My Daddy is in the United States Navy and I'm going to see him. We are going to celebrate my 5th birthday."

On reflection I think that since our world continued to suffer from World War II, I wasn't asked difficult questions.

My biggest surprise on the train came from a smiling gentleman who gave me a little doll. I have no idea why he just happened to have a doll. It seemed like the gift had been selected for me. I gave him a hug and said, "Thank you." I treasured that small doll with blond hair, a plaid dress plus arms and legs that moved.

Before I knew it we were getting off the train. I spotted my Daddy running toward us. I was one happy little girl. Daddy had found us a room in the basement of a hotel. We soon learned that we would have to move every five days. I think we moved three times. The reason for moving wasn't clear to me. It had something to do with trying to house a lot of people who came in and out of San Francisco.

Daddy had to go back and forth to his ship to prepare for the next trip. Mother knew people from our home town of Chandler, Oklahoma had come to California for work. Their youngest daughter was just my age. They invited us to go to the Redwood Forest to celebrate my fifth birthday. I was thrilled because Mrs. Mears made me a birthday cake. The time with friends helped since Daddy couldn't be with us much. He did come some nights, but I must have been sleeping. Mother told me he visited.

We soon went back home. Daddy went back to the sea. I didn't mind leaving because I thought he would be home soon. I still remember vividly the shaking bed and rattling dishes and I'm afraid of earth quaking to this day.