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Sunday Routine | Curtis Sliwa

Going Along for the Rides

By ALAN FEUER

Curtis Sliwa, 55, has spent the last 30 years riding the New York City subways as the founding member of the Guardian Angels crime-patrolling group. He has a second career as a radio talk show host on WABC-AM (770). He spends each Sunday touring the subway system with his 5-year-old son, Anthony, while his long-suffering wife, Mary, also 55, waits at their home on the Upper East Side of Manhattan.



Curtis Sliwa and his son, Anthony, 5. "He learned all his letters from the subways: A train, B train, C train. The numbers, too: 1, 2, 3," Mr. Sliwa said of his son.

Michelle V. Agins/The New York Times

WHEN DO YOU LEAVE? About 10 or so, but we'll sometimes go until 7 o'clock at night — or at least until his mother starts calling wanting him back. I'm in my Guardian Angels garb and everybody's looking at us like, "You got to be kidding — I thought you'd be in a limo or something." But my kid's like me, he's a subway rider. He learned all his letters from the subways: A train, B train, C train. The numbers, too: 1, 2, 3.

THE STANDARD ROUTE I usually take him out to the last stop at Coney Island — Stillwell Avenue — where you can see all the trains come in simultaneously. He loves to watch the motormen warm up the cars. They'll even beep the cars for him sometimes. He can't get enough of that.

BASEBALL BREAK Around noon or so we'll take a break and throw around a baseball with the Dominican kids on the ball fields near the old Benjamin Franklin High School in East Harlem, near where Rao's Restaurant is. Because Dominican kids have a true love of the game. You see them on the fields and they're, like, hitting rocks if they don't have a ball — it's incredible. But after a half-hour, 45 minutes, he loses interest. He wants back on the trains.

LUNCH? It's basically a stop for dirty-water hot dogs, but we kind of have to do it on the sly because my wife says, "Make sure it's a turkey dog or a tofu dog," and I just say, "Yeah, right." I'll have a knish and a Dr. Brown's, and the only thing I worry about is him eating the bun and the hot dog separately. I tell him: "No, son. You have to eat the hot dog in the bun. None of this separating stuff."

TRADING UP If he gets sick of the regular subways, he'll start asking for the "Super Train." The Super Train is either the Long Island Rail Road, which we catch at Woodside where the 7 train stops, or Metro-North or even the New Jersey railroad in the direction of Trenton. But I usually try to keep it local.

CHOO-CHOO CHARLIE I swear, I'm actually afraid my kid is one of those kids you read about who puts on M.T.A. overalls at 14 and he's like Choo-Choo Charlie taking a train on his own. I can actually see it: him stealing an A train all the way from Inwood to Far Rockaway-Mott Avenue. One time, he walked right into the motorman's booth and started pulling on the lever. Thank God, it was locked.

PELÉ? FUHGGEDABOUTIT My wife — she inspects us for belly lint — she always says, "Why does he love subways so much? Why can't he be like other kids and just play soccer?" But it's great for him. I mean, it wasn't until he started riding that he even started talking.

SECOND CHILDHOOD When he goes to sleep, it's just my wife berating me. "Why were you out so long? This is what you consider a family day?" I say: "You don't understand, Mary. When he lights up like that, I sort of relive my childhood." When we're on the trains together, we're like two peas in pods. I mean, we're not even like father and son. We're like brothers.