

The Bus Driver

It took me six years to get my bachelor's degree and I went to four different universities, sometimes going to school part time and working, but mostly my credits were from Washington State University, where I graduated at Pullman.

I would work and got to school intermittently and often had to settle for low paying jobs. I worked at the Holland library at Washington State, shelving books in 1964, despite the fact that I am incredibly allergic to newsprint and library dust. The pay was one dollar an hour.

I went around the library with a cart and picked up the books the students had been reading in the little carroll spaces. Everyday, I would find a book with gynecological diseases left in one carroll. I never saw the student who was "reading" that book, but I got tired of reshelving it every day, so I ditched it in another place in the library, thwarting the perv's pleasure.

I found another job that paid the princely sum of a dollar fifteen an hour, driving a forty-five foot school bus, both morning and afternoon on a fifty-five mile route, picking up and delivering farmers' kids for school. This was in the middle of winter, with icy and snowy roads.

I was hired by the school administrator and told to report to the school bus garage. There, I reported to a crusty, anti-hippie, red-neck boss, who informed me that I had to shave my beard off, which I had had for six or seven years. He said it would frighten the children when they first got on the bus.

I would get to the bus barn at 7 o'clock in the morning to wash off the back of the bus, so the lights would be visible and raise the hood and check the oil. I would walk across the front of the bus in my school clothes, where there was a two foot deep trough for the dirt and oil from the bus. It was usually covered with a metal grate.

One morning after washing the back of the bus, I walked around to check the oil and put my foot in the oily grunge of the sump, almost up to my knee. I was wearing fresh school clothes because I could just make my 9 o'clock class after dropping the kids off.

I was enraged and I confronted the master of the bus garage who had neglected to put the grate back in place. He informed me that I should "lump it" and if I didn't like it, I should find another job.

The first child I picked up every day was a delightful little kindergarten girl named Alice. She was the first one in the morning for the fifty-five mile route and the first one off on the return afternoon trip. We often chatted as we rode together.

The farm kids on the bus ranged from kindergarten to Grade 12. The older ones were nasty little bastards who would sometimes bring screwdrivers on the bus to take screws out of the seats and throw them out the window. A friend said that if I had a beard and a shotgun, I might have some success with the nasty little buggers.

I dropped the kids off at two schools - the elementary-junior high and the high school, then it was back to the garage to park my bus, hop in my Volkswagen Beetle, drive to the university and make it to my first 9 o'clock class.

At about 3:30pm, it was back to the bus garage and a reverse order of the morning's drive. The roads were often snowy and I got the bus stuck a couple of times, but the farmer dads pulled the bus out with a tractor.

I did the job until school was out that year and often thought about little Alice about a dozen years later, when I walked my own little daughter to kindergarten and the library.....little Molly.