

WANDA BISHOP

LESSONS

FROM THE

DRIVERS SEAT



Published by
Hybrid Global Publishing
301 E. 57th Street, 4th floor
New York, NY 10022

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Bishop, Wanda
Lessons From the Driver's Seat
ISBN: 978-1-953586-01-8.

Interior design: Medlar Publishing Solutions Pvt Ltd., India



CONTENTS

Preface

- 1 The Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round
- 2 The Many Hats of a School Bus Driver
- 3 Silly Boys
- 4 Best Friends
- 5 Chicken Feet
- 6 Many Different Languages on the Bus
- 7 Let It Go!
- 8 Kids Are Important
- 9 Out of the Mouths of Babes
- 10 Teamwork
- 11 Important Jobs
- 12 Unrest Between Students
- 13 Road Rage
- 14 Marine Sargent Grandfather
- 15 Drugs, Giving Up, and Suicide
- 16 Little Boys and Frogs
- 17 Some Things Have to Change

18 Advice from the School Bus Driver

19 A Day in the Life of a School Bus Driver

20 Curiosity and More Lessons!

Famous Words on The School Bus

About the Author



THE WHEELS ON THE BUS GO ROUND AND ROUND

The wheels on the bus go round and round, round and round, round and round. The wheels on the bus go round and round, all through the town.

—Traditional Nursery Rhyme

OVER THE YEARS OF singing that little jingle with my own children, I sure never thought it would become a part of my destiny. Life has a funny way of putting new directions in front of us for some reason. So, twenty years ago I accepted the opportunity to become a school bus driver. The decision was easy for me. I love kids, I love being around them. Kids are great! They are cute, funny, and entertaining; they want to know everything about anything. They do not see race, religion, or gender. They do not have hang-ups; they do not hold on to anger. They just let go and know that tomorrow is another day, and they look forward to it with excitement and joy in their heart. To me, they are just about the greatest little human beings on the face of the earth.

But all the training, videos, and classes I attended, passing the test at the DOT (Department of Transportation), and actually driving the bus still did not prepare me for what could—and would—happen inside the bus! Just like with any job, there were times I wanted to quit. All the many rules and guidelines can create controversy and frustration. Yet, when I looked at “my kids,” I just had to come back day after day. They always made it worth it.

I have learned so much from observing these kids grow up, going from toothless little kindergarteners to curious middle schoolers, and then becoming proud high school students that can hardly wait to spread their

wings and take on the world. I've watched them handle hurts and setbacks. I've seen them challenge one another, but also support and inspire one another. Kids are stronger than you think. They are smart, loving, and want to be loved; they want to be needed and appreciated. Kids will do just about anything for you if you ask them nicely.

Each day I spent with these students was a new experience, an unfolding miracle. Kids deserve to be treated with love and respect, to receive guidance, support, and encouragement always. To be taught right from wrong, and highly celebrated for doing the right thing. I have loved being a part of their lives, and I have high hopes that most of their dreams will come true.



THE MANY HATS OF A SCHOOL BUS DRIVER

A child is like an uncut diamond.

—Austin O'Mally

OVER THE YEARS OF being a school bus driver, my duties increased. I didn't mind; it just became part of the job. Driving students to school was the first and most important. Then came along nurse duty. Several times during the school year, I had to help with many tummy aches, a lot of vomiting, viruses, bloody noses, allergy season, potty accidents, bee stings, and much more. With forty to sixty elementary students on a bus, there is always something going on with someone.

At the beginning of the year, I think the kids start out with tummy aches from being nervous about new teachers, new classrooms, new friends, and other new changes they will face. The younger ones are just getting used to leaving the safety of their home and parents or guardians. They're not yet sure what to expect. Sometimes I could get them to hold on until we got to school, but other times I just had to stop the bus and be a helping hand. Flashers on, traffic honking, a little one choking and crying, the child next to them screaming, "She (or he) threw up on me," and crying because her new sparkling shoes are all messed up now. I would quickly reach for the paper towels and body fluids kits, as I tried to settle everyone down until we could get to school.

When an older student got sick on the bus, the fourth or fifth graders often would laugh and make fun of the sick one. To make matters worse, they would feel the need to describe it: "Oh yuck, it looks like cottage cheese" or "Look, it looks like fruit loops!" Then guess what? Some crazy

snoopy nose would have to come look. While I'm yelling at the kids to stay in their seats and settle down, Mr. Snoopy Nose starts throwing up, and now everyone is laughing and making fun of him—and the entire bus is a mess. Trying to get to school as fast and safely as possible, I'd call ahead to the school for student assistance. I'd be hoping a school janitor would help me clean up the mess. Wouldn't you know, the janitor was unavailable. It's time for me to put on the janitor's hat and become a single person clean-up crew. After speed-cleaning and disinfecting the bus in record time, it was time to head to the next part of my route.

As the days go by, things start to settle down; school is off to a good start. Everyone seems to be used to the new routines and new time schedules. Along comes fall, which means leaf collections, poster boards, and Halloween (lots of fun and candy)! But it's a rule: no eating on the bus. It's hard to enforce some rules. Behind the tall safety seats of a school bus, the candy and snacks just happen. Thankfully it doesn't happen very often (but it's not unusual either): someone lets out a scream concerning their tooth. A hard piece of candy either caused their tooth to break or made a filling fall out, and now they're crying because their mom or dad is going to be so mad. Time to put on the hat of a dentist! Giving aid to a child with a bleeding tooth or trying to find the lost tooth on the floor so they won't miss the tooth fairy. With the older ones, I've had to step in as an eye doctor when they've lost a contact lens and I hear, "Stop the bus! nobody move—pick your feet up!"

Have you ever been driving when a wasp or a loudly buzzing bee gets in your vehicle? Now imagine forty to sixty kids screaming in fear. A few brave young men try swatting at it, slapping it into another student or making it hit the window, which only causes it to get angrier and ready to sting anything in its way. Now I'm the exterminator! A few times when this happened, people passing by called the police, turning me in for letting my kids be too rowdy and out of control on the bus! It was the same reaction if there were a few crickets on the bus—or God help us—a few times when a grasshopper somehow found its way in the bus. There was one time in twenty years—I repeat, one time in twenty years—when a lady pulled up beside my bus and asked if we were OK, offering to call 911 or get help for me. I will never forget her concern. That lady deserved some type of award!



SILLY BOYS

If you see someone without a smile, give them one of yours.

—Dolly Parton

ONE MORNING AS I started running my route, I heard a few of the boys carrying on and getting a little too rowdy. I asked them to settle down, but their laughter and giggles began getting louder and louder. The boys were squirming around and almost falling out their seats. Again, a little more forcefully this time, I told the boys they were going to have to settle down and stay in their seats!

More students were getting curious and started turning around, trying to get a glimpse of what was so funny and crazy back there. I was keeping an eye on them through my student mirror, and one boy's eyes caught mine; he had a very embarrassed look on his face. Now I knew something out of the ordinary was going on. I got to an area where I could stop the bus, and I asked one of the boys to come up front and tell me what all of the commotion was about.

With his head down, he told me that Ricky was wearing his mom's THONG! *Oh my gosh*, I thought to myself, trying to keep from laughing. He went on to describe in detail the pain Ricky was in. "The thong is red and has all these sparkles and hearts hanging on it, and now it's stuck in his butt crack, and he needs to get it off! He can't cut it off because it was his mom's Valentine's Day gift from his dad!" The plot thickens.

Ricky's friend then asked, "Can we block Ricky's seat from the other kids seeing him long enough for him to take his pants and the thong off and get his pants on before we get to school?"

“Oh my goodness, NO!” I said. “Now everyone, settle down and let’s get to school safely. When we arrive, you boys can go to the principle’s office and ask for his help concerning this problem.”

I’ve always wondered if Ricky’s parents ever found out!

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