

Always with Us

Marilyn Bushman-Carlton

Years later, at a high school reunion,
a girl gave a tribute to a classmate who had died.
Not knowing another way to end
her remarks, she did so
“in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.”

I thought of Mr. Stone who was always with us:
in church on Sundays,
and driving the school bus five days a week.

He sat at the wheel
in jacket and leather gloves, a blue ironed shirt,
and hair leafed with gold.

On coldest mornings, he'd reward
some one child with the chance to sit beside him
near the heater. It was enough.

He kept his bus tidy—
no unclean or fractious thing was allowed
to enter his chapel on wheels
that, despite journeying children twice a day,
smelled always renewed.

Abruptly,
perhaps once or twice a year,
he'd pull over,
stop the bus, and with surprising passion,
pull the emergency brake,

lift from the plastic pocket above his head
the tablet of rules,
turn toward the congregation—
even the innocent repentant now—
bend his head to necessity,
and read them aloud,

always straight through from 1 to 10
never raising his voice,
never commenting on any certain one,

never shaming who it was
who needed to be reminded . . .

in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.