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# The School Bus Driver

By **Ava J. Sailors**

**W**e can rest assured that romance was flourishing in Western Oklahoma in 1928! In fact, early one morning of that year, a young girl climbed aboard the school bus near Midway, Oklahoma, in Northwestern Roger Mills County. With a quickened heartbeat, Margie Bell Berry, age thirteen, saw the new bus driver.

He was only sixteen there in the driver's seat—his wavy blond hair carefully combed back, his eyes, as blue as the Oklahoma skies, taking in the auburn hair and radiant smile of his last passenger.

When he gave Margie Bell a sudden grin, she dropped her eyes and shyly hurried to the back to take a seat. But Alvin Leroy Snowden was already realizing there was something special about the blushing girl.

It wasn't long until Alvin asked her to sit in front on the seat with him. She hesitated a moment, then ignoring the loud whistles and laughter, settled herself on the driver's seat near him. Waiting demurely as Alvin quieted his crew and put the bus in gear, she then looked up at him, giving him her dazzling smile, and took her place in his heart forever.

Even good friends can suffer from jealousy, and a certain friend of Margie Bell's, who was also totally captivated by the young bus driver, couldn't help but silently rejoice when Margie Bell confided several months later that she was moving away with her family to a location near Oklahoma City.

On Margie Bell's last day of school, the friend was determined to begin sitting beside Alvin as Margie had done. According to plan, a cluster of classmates held Margie Bell back while the friend slipped into the front seat, pulling a visiting girlfriend onto her lap.

Seeing what was happening, a male friend of Margie Bell's sat down quickly in the driver's seat to hold that place for her. As Margie Bell came hurrying up the steps, the boy stood up to let her

sit down, but the friend slipped triumphantly into the spot and refused to budge.

Blinking back tears, Margie Bell prepared to sit somewhere else when Alvin's strong hand shot out and caught her arm. "Where are you going?" he asked shortly. "There's no room for me," she replied in an unsteady voice.

Taking her hand, he led her around to his side of the seat and told her to sit in his place. He squeezed in beside her, and they rode, four people packed stubbornly into the seat, until the two extra girls had to get off at their stop. The former friends may not have told each other goodbye, but Margie Bell knew the thrill of victory that day.

At age sixteen, after living three years near Oklahoma City, she and her family moved back to Midway. She began going out with Alvin—though both of them dated others—and playing basketball. In the red and white uniform, she was a striking figure. Many years later, Alvin, teasing her, would say, "Your legs were the first thing I noticed about you!"

Margie Bell was not only attractive and robust, but friendly and cheerful, though she lived in near poverty with her fatherless family. She was a favorite with both teachers and classmates and was told by one teacher that if everyone laughed as much as she did, the world would be a much better place. He then added how he wished, if she and Alvin got married, that he could be around to see the children they would have.

Margie Bell's parents had been divorced since she was

very small, but one day her father came back and persuaded her mother to remarry him. They then moved away to his small farm near Minco. Four months later, he died suddenly, leaving Margie Bell and her mother with no money and no way to manage the farm. They were forced to live with Margie's older sister in Oklahoma City.

About a year later, someone knocked on the door, and when Margie Bell opened it, there stood her handsome bus driver, his blue eyes regarding her very seriously. He cleared his throat and in a halting voice said, "If you're willing, I'd like to have you around all the time."

Margie Bell was willing, and they were married on October 12, 1934, at Sayre. On October 21, 1937, the first of their five children was born. Alvin and Margie Bell lived together nearly thirty-two years until July 16, 1966, when Alvin, who had battled cancer for two years, gave up his fight. Margie Bell's handsome young bus driver was gone but would never be forgotten.

As the oldest of their children, I feel so privileged to have them as parents; and Donna Mae, Alvinita [Margie Snowden North], Rose Marie, and Ransom fervently echo that feeling.

Today, Margie Bell is happily married to Alvin's fine cousin, Roy Fowler. They live in Elk City—not too many miles from where, long ago, the old school bus lumbered along the dirt road, ground to a stop, and the driver opened the door to his future.

(AVA J. SAILORS, who has previously published in WESTVIEW, now lives in Stinnett, Texas, where her husband is a Church of Christ minister.) \*