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The Story of Marjorie and the Wayward Bus

By REV. WILLIAM E. MOHANT

Assistant Director, Department of Education, National Catholic Welfare Conference

The first was coming from the north. A

gray shadow of water fell on the road and

the little group of children waited at the

school bus stop. Together all but one little

girl who stood apart from the others—they

waited beyond the muddy puddles which the

fast-moving cars and trucks splashed along

the edge of the highway. Many flashes of lightning

and sudden strokes of lightning crossed them

and the group drew closer together, leaving

the little girl far apart from them.

As the storm closed, she fought against

the tears that blurred her eyes. Everything came

at once, she thought—her ninth birthday, her

first day at a new school, the awful storm, and

these children whom she had never met before.

For a moment Marjorie Ryan was tempted to

go home but there was in her spirit a sense

of duty which held her. She waited as a huge

disaster-stricken truck rumbled past, then she

saw the school bus coming in the rain.

The children pushed back toward the high-

way lane as the Sutton County Public School

bus pulled over to the side of the road. The

youngsters cheered. One by one they boarded

the vehicle. Marjorie was at the end of the line.

"Where do you go to school?" asked the

driver. Holding her little head proudly the

child said, "I'm a new pupil at St. Peter's."

The driver rose from his seat and put his arm

around the child. "Wait a minute. You can't

ride in this bus, little lady. We only carry

the school kids. This is a non-sectarian bus!"

The other children looked on. One boy said, "Aw,

let her ride. It's against the law."

Marjorie stepped off the bus. She wanted to

cry, but the tears wouldn't flow. She felt hurt

all over, like someone had punished her for

something she didn't do. Should she return

home? Mother and Dad were going away to

buy furniture for the new house. They'd be

gone by this time. She couldn't go home. She

must walk to school—three miles away. She

ran across the road to walk against the trucks

and cars rushing down the hill which led into

town. Most people driving by must have figured

that she had missed the bus, but nobody stopped

to offer her a ride. It's risky business to pick

up children.

At the top of the hill the three-tracked main-

line of the railroad crosses highway 36. Marjorie

saw the wig-wag warning lights flicker.

She wanted to run across. It would be terrible

to be late for school the very first day. Any-

way, she thought, the freight wasn't moving

very fast. Luckily she waited. The flyer, a

little late because of the rain and fog, roared

past the freight and across the highway.

New Marjorie was in town. At last—side-

walks. Marjorie ran. She hoped she wouldn't

be late. Around the corner and there they were—

across the street from the other—the

Sutton County Public School and St. Peter's

Catholic School. Marjorie was so excited that

she didn't even see the school bus parked in the

alley. She rushed up the stairs to the school

office.

"I'm the new pupil," she gasped. "I hope

it's not late. A nice lady said, 'Don't worry,

little girl. Just give me your transfer slip.'"

Marjorie fumbled in her school bag until she

finally produced a very damp envelope. There

it is," she said. "Oh, my! The nice lady ex-

plained, 'You've missed the bus.' 'This,'

she said, 'is the public school. I wondered why

you were asking me. I suppose you had to

walk. I'm so sorry that only public school

children are allowed to ride on the public bus.

Well, run along!"

Again Marjorie wanted to cry, but she didn't.

Daddy had told her that she should never cry

unless she was a bad girl. She hadn't done any-

thing bad.

The Sister Superior of St. Peter's welcomed

Marjorie. Off came the wet shoes and stockings.

Sister had a supply of stockings and

slippers for such emergencies. "Well," Sister

said, "today will have to drive you to school

in the future. Three miles walking is far too

much for a little girl. Or else"—Sister

hesitated to say it—"you'll have to go to the



"FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL KIDS ONLY!"

by automatic crossing lights.

"(5) Last year, before this county purchased

a bus, three children were killed, two by auto-

mobile, one by train.

"(6) Since we have had this bus attendance

during the winter months and during inclement

weather has increased 20 per cent."

After this recital of facts and figures, the

president of the board continued, "I'm sure that

no reasonable taxpayer will seriously object to

an expenditure which protects the lives of the

children in this county. Times have changed,

my friend. When you were a boy, there weren't

so many traffic hazards. Now a child risks his

life every time he walks down that highway."

Mr. Ryan was chuckling, but he kept a seri-

ous appearance. "Well, then, Mr. President,"

he said, "this appropriation is a measure for

public safety. How does it concern the school

board which is supposed to restrict its interests

to education?"

The President, now somewhat perturbed,

leaned over the desk and with a great deal of

emphasis, said, "I'm a lawyer, and I've investi-

gated this question thoroughly. You are right

in saying that the authorization to operate

schools does not carry with it the right to pro-

vide transportation. However, the state has

delegated this county board two important and

closely associated responsibilities: (1) the en-

forcement of the compulsory education law, and

(2) the operation and regulation of pupil trans-

portation. The two must go together. There

is no point in authorizing this board to compel

parents who live eight miles from school to

send their children to school unless at the same

time we have the power to give them trans-

portation."

"Well, Mr. President," Mr. Ryan said, "I must

confess that I am now over to a favorable at-

titude toward this resolution. I am the father

of three children. One of them goes to school.

Certainly, I wouldn't want any child in this

county exposed unnecessarily to the dangers of

the highway. But I have one question. This

morning my daughter, Marjorie, was put off

the Sutton County School bus. She was told

that it was a non-sectarian bus. There must

be some mistake. I'm sure . . .

"Now, sir," interrupted the president, "this

board is opposed to a union of church and state.

Our bus is reserved for children who attend

the classics,