

EULOGY

Nobody Gets Left at the Curb

Remembering Carol Bennett, who always circled back

In loving memory of Carol Bennett

Written with Fablely - fablely.ai

I'm Carol's child. For twenty-seven years she drove a school bus through Asheville, and for every one of my years before that and since, she drove the rest of us too, whether we wanted steering or not. So I hope you'll let me take a few minutes to tell you about her, because three to five minutes is nowhere near enough, but it's what I've got, and she'd tell me to get on with it anyway.

Mom raised my brother and me on her own after Dad left in 1994. I don't say that for sympathy. I say it because I want you to understand what it means that a woman who was already stretched that thin still found room, every single week, to coach the church softball team. She did not have extra time. She made it, the way she made everything - by deciding it mattered and then simply doing it.

She knew every kid on her route by name. Not just ours - every kid, every year, for twenty-seven years. That's not a small thing. That's thousands of names, thousands of faces she learned on purpose because she believed each one deserved to be known by somebody. On the first day of school she'd put on the most ridiculous hat you ever saw - I mean a genuinely absurd hat - and she'd wear it up and down that bus, because she knew there'd be some kindergartner somewhere crying about leaving home for the first time, and she figured a kid can't cry and laugh at the same time. So she made them laugh. And under her seat, always, she kept a box of granola bars, for the ones who'd left home too fast that morning to grab breakfast. Nobody made her do that. Nobody paid her extra for it. She just couldn't stand the thought of a hungry kid sitting behind her for forty minutes and her not doing something about it.

That was the whole of her philosophy, really, and she said it so often we could all say it with her: nobody gets left at the curb. She meant it about the bus. But she meant it about everything. She meant it about us.

Here's what I'll miss most. Every Sunday, seven o'clock, the phone would ring, and it would be Mom, and the first thing out of her mouth - not hello, not how are you, really - was "what'd you eat today?" For years I thought it was funny, this woman who drove a bus for a living still checking that her grown kids were being fed. But I understand it now for what it actually was. It wasn't really about food. It was her way of making sure that wherever we were, however far from her kitchen table, somebody was still keeping track of us. Somebody still had us on their route.

I don't know yet what Sundays at seven are going to feel like without that call. I suspect I'll still reach for the phone before I remember. But I know what she left behind in this room, because I can see it - in everyone who ever climbed onto her bus and felt a little less scared, in every kid who ate a granola bar they needed and never had to ask, in every one of us who learned from her, plainly, by watching her do it, what it looks like to show up for people who have no particular claim on you except that they're in front of you and they need somebody.

So, Mom - thank you for the hats, and the granola bars, and every single Sunday at seven. Thank you for never once, in your whole life, leaving anybody at the curb. We've got it from here. We love you. Go on and rest now.