

A Busload of Kids

Many memories come flooding back to me when I recall my years at the German School or Deutsche Schule Washington—the DSW as we called it at the time. There were definitely many teachers that made a lasting impression and lots of lessons that still serve me well today. Trying to decide what to write about or share made me think about some of the less obvious people that helped us during our school years – the bus drivers. Looking through some of the old yearbooks, I recognize some of their faces – Mr. Mike Hartwigsen, Mr. P. Ryon, Clint, and Ms. Jackie Bissett.



Jackie Bissett (3rd from left) and her fellow bus drivers (1979).

I spent two hours every day on the bus because I lived far from our school. I remember the drivers picked us up pretty close to home and had a lot of stops, so we were always late to school during the first week of school as the drivers were still learning their route. A good friend of mine started to save me a seat on the first day of school as we learned this was an regular occurrence.

In my case, since my mother worked, we would sometimes drive to an earlier stop, so my mother would not be late for work. Additionally, our drop-off schedule after school was a specific schedule based on my



DSW Bus Drivers: Their dedication to safety, patience, and kindness made it possible for so many of us to get to and from school.

mother's work schedule. Some days we needed to be dropped off at the baby-sitter's house, other days taken home to our house. I remember the very few times the driver accidentally took us to the wrong stop, but, even though there were no cell phones yet, the adults somehow figured out what to do, so we made it to the correct destination.

I also remember how patient these drivers were with their busload of kids. Before the main school on Chateau Drive was built, we also relied on our bus drivers to ferry us to the various classrooms spread out across



Here students are boarding a German School bus at the Sisters of Mercy buildings on Kentsdale Road in Potomac where instruction was held during the early 1970s.

Potomac and to come back in the afternoon to bring us back to the main bus stop where everyone found their bus home. We also had an early and a late bus, and the drivers somehow figured out how to get us all where we needed to be. They tolerated our loud after-school energy as we played – mostly while sitting in our seats – until we arrived at our stop.

One driver - Ms. Jackie Bissett - lived only a few blocks from our house, and she gave me and my sister a part-time job dusting and vacuuming her house once a week. Another driver even started to drive up our court and pick us up almost at our front door. Turning the long bus around in the court wasn't always easy. Other drivers



"Loud after-school energy as we played – mostly while sitting in our seats," recalls the author (1970s).



Stella Lyman and her friend Jay visited the German School for a 2017 class reunion and the October Fun Run. Stella was able to get a bus ride from the Sisters of Mercy to the Chateau Drive campus, which reminded her of the old days at the DSW.

were very generous with their wait time as we sometimes raced down the street a few minutes late to a waiting bus.

I think I realized how lucky we were to have these drivers in tenth grade, when I needed to arrive at school an hour early once a week for a math class. My parents later bought me a moped, and, even in the cold winter months, I had to drive the long way to school on the moped instead of in the warm bus.

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