

OPINION

Thursday

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Departure delayed due to human heart

On a cold, dark night,
a bus driver touches
the soul of kindness

No one should be out on a cold night like this. But I was. A few lights flickered in the midnight darkness as we drove down Haslett Road.

I had lifted our 3-year-old from a warm bed and plunked her down into a frozen car seat. She never fluttered an eye. While she dreamed, I drove through deserted streets to fetch her father from the Amtrak station off South Harrison Road.

As I pulled into the cold, poorly-lit parking lot, polite but leery drivers already waiting there eyed me with suspicion. Another stranger to assimilate into this silent darkness.

The bus was late. As I waited, I looked back over my shoulders to catch a dream skittering just beneath my daughter's eyelids. My dreams from the previous night flooded back: Tornadoes poured down from the sky, I turned to seek shelter only to discover a small boy following, with his hand



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Voices

reaching towards me. His knowing smile made me realize I was to make sure he was safe.

With great relief, I understood that as I cared for him, someone else would care for my own daughter. I woke from this dream thinking, "This is the way the world should be: people taking care of people they do not know."

At that moment, the bus shuttle rocked into the back lot, releasing its brakes, turning on those silver-gray overhead lights, before setting passengers free for luggage and loved ones.

My husband climbed into the front seat, tired but chuckling. After greeting me, he shared the story behind the 10-minute delay.

At the Amtrak station in Battle Creek, Carl Briggs, veteran bus driver for Indian Trails Motor Coach, announced the shuttle's immediate departure. A young passenger, who had been in a spirited conversation in a phone booth next to the bus, bounded up the bus steps and declared to Mr. Briggs, "I'm trying to explain to my mother where the bus drop off is in Flint. She says she's had a hard day at work. Would you mind talking to her and explaining where she can pick me up? She says she is in no mood for my foolishness."

Carl Briggs disembarked, walked over to the phone booth and for five minutes talked with the boy's mother, offering those clear, hand-waving directions one only demonstrates on the phone.

While he calmed her confusions and fears, passengers waited.

As the bus approached Lansing, another fellow asked Mr. Briggs, "You know of a hotel around here? I need a room for the night." Mr. Briggs offered to take him to a hotel along the way — and did.

Passengers at the back of the bus

exchanged looks of amazement. But their amazement soon grew into disbelief. For just when everyone thought they were finally on their way, Carl Briggs pulled on the brakes, jumped off the bus, and ran back into the hotel lobby, to make sure he did find a room. "I don't like leaving people out in the cold," Briggs said.

We've all felt that sinking feeling after hearing of impending delays due to bad weather, canceled flights, and other "mechanical failures."

What about a delay caused by the human heart?

As we drove home, lights still beamed across the darkness. I thought of Mr. Briggs and the way he made us wait while he tugged on the hem of that dream. "We can do no great things," Mother Teresa once said, "only small things, with great love."

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