

ELEGY FOR A SCHOOL BUS DRIVER

WILLIAM WALSH

Because my daughter needed bubble wrap
for a science project, and because

we popped all of them
in the car before we got home,

I drove back to Publix
where I also bought a Sunday paper

and found his photograph.
While Olivia squatted on top of the kitchen table

in her bare feet, carefully
gluing macaroni to a blue poster board,

I laid down my last summer
of baseball to memory—how he stood alone,

away from the other parents, his fingers
gripping the chain-link fence, black lines

of grime half-circling beneath his nails—angel
of the grease rack watching his gangly son

fall backwards in right field
as a “can of corn” arced over head.

With real skin in the game,
minor league scouts charted my pitches,

but it wasn't my slow curve
that eventually caused trouble—it was

my Vida Blue snowball
slipping one winter morning

at the bus stop, off just enough
to catch Connie, the neighborhood snitch,

under her wire-rim glasses, exploding
like a depth charge of bitchiness.

Crying, she ratted me out,
and as he looked up

through the oblong mirror
to where I sat quietly

in the back row, ready
for whatever another day of detention

might bring. . .
somehow to be

spared by a man
who knew how it was

to be stuck in a mill town
with no escape plan.