

why school buses are yellow by James Patrick Kelly

In the beginning, everyone went to school at night.

The first bell rang at 10 PM and kids sat in class until midnight, when everyone went to the lunchroom to eat. The cafeteria food didn't actually look all that bad under the lights.

For a while our school here in town had flashlight night and Mrs. Perkins turned off all the lights in the cafeteria and the kids ate by flashlight. But that ended when our lunch ladies complained about the mess. After lunch there was recess, but since none of the kids parents allowed them to play outside in the middle of the night, recess wasn't much fun. Mostly kids just sat in the hall and played go fish or doodled in their notebooks or counted the floor tiles. After recess, everyone went back to class. The buses came at 3:30 in the morning. Most of them were black, although some were dark blue or purple with brown polka dots. You had to look real hard to see them. Kids usually got home in time for sunrise and a nice breakfast of hamburgers or pizza or maybe chicken nuggets.

The good thing about night school was that all the kids studied hard and were did well on standardized tests because when they looked out the window in class there was nothing to see. The bad thing about night school was ... well there wasn't anything bad. Everyone thought it was perfect. Or at least that's what they thought in the beginning. they weren't very smart back then.

Except a man named Bob. He owned a paint store in my hometown of Nottingham, New Hampshire, which I'm sure you've never heard of. Bob wasn't doing very much business because all the grownups slept during the day when their kids were asleep and went to work at night when their kids were in school. And because they were mostly up in the dark, they couldn't see that their houses needed to be painted. Which meant Bob didn't sell much paint, which meant he had time at night to sit and think.

Bob realized that his own kids weren't happy. They kept complaining that their lives were boring. There were no sports. No riding bikes or swimming. In the winter there was night skiing, but that was so freezing. Even TV was boring. Have you ever watched TV at four in the morning? There's nothing on but news and Home Shopping and shows about the pyramids in Egypt or England or wherever they are. And by the time all the good shows came on, Bob's kids had to go to sleep so they could be rested up for night school.

So Bob wrote a letter to the President of Our Beloved Land and gave him a suggestion. This was Bob's first good, no, *excellent* idea. Why not move school to the day time? Say first thing in the morning, right after sunrise. Just a little after everyone got up. That way, kids wouldn't have to sleep most of the day. They could play soccer and throw Frisbees and swim in the lake. If they went to school first thing, then they would be done in the afternoon when the sun was still shining and they could do stuff outside or at least there would be something worth watching on TV.

Well, the President showed Bob's letter to the Vice-President of Our Beloved Land and she showed it to the Secretary of Learning and Other Educational Stuff and she wrote a memo about how they should try having school during the day, but just during the month of February as a test because if it didn't work, then at least the mistake would last only twenty-eight days. But as it turned out, everybody liked going to school during the day a lot, kids and parents and teachers and especially the bus drivers, who were really

tired of squinting to see in the dark when they drove. They liked it so much that they kept it up into March and April. In May of that year, kids invented kickball and grownups invented golf, because they had so much extra time in the day. And so the President of Our Beloved Land proposed a law that said all school everywhere shall be held during the day only — forthwith and notwithstanding. And later Senate passed an amendment to the law that said because the best days came in the summer, there should be no school from June to September. At all. Period.

Soon everyone was so much happier than they had been in the beginning. The Senator from New Hampshire decided to hold hearings about why everyone was so happy. It was, after all, an election year. The Senator called Bob to testify. Bob explained that it was his idea to have school during the day and so Bob got his picture in the paper on the front page with an article that was continued in the Lifestyle section.

The reporter asked Bob what was his favorite cartoon and he said, "The one with the rabbit." They asked him what his favorite sport was and he said "The one where you throw the ball." They asked him what his favorite bird was and he said "The one that sits on my bird feeder." And they asked him what his favorite color and he said... well, is anyone still awake? What do you think he said?

When the President of Our Beloved Land read this article, he remembered reading Bob's letter. He declared that there would be a holiday on Bob's birthday called Bob's Day to thank Bob, because, after all, the President was up for re-election too. And Bob decided that if there was going to be a holiday on his birthday, then maybe his paint store should have a sale on paint, because everyone would have the day off and maybe his sales would pick up. And that was Bob's second good, no excellent idea. Because all the bus drivers read the article in the paper and to show their appreciation for Bob they came into Bob's store and bought gallons of Bob's favorite color paint which was... well, you know. They painted their buses that color because now that they were driving around in the daytime they felt kind of dumb in their black and dark blue buses and especially the buses that were purple with brown polka dots. Plus, they liked having their busses the color of the sun, which was usually shining brightly when they picked kids up and dropped them off.

Bob lived to be a hundred and seven years old. He sold a lot of paint, most of it his favorite color. His grandchildren still own the paint store. But the reason why you've never celebrated Bob's Day is because they changed it to Columbus Day during the first Eisenhower administration, because after all, Columbus discovered America, and all Bob discovered was that it was a really dumb idea to send kids to school in the middle of the night. Now nobody remembers him anymore but his great-grandchildren and the entire population of my hometown of Nottingham, New Hampshire, which I'm sure you've never heard of. And that's why school buses are yellow.