

## The Extra Mile

by Carrie Tinsley

Adult - 2nd place winner

Wilson Central High School

Wilson County



It's not every day that we see purely selfless acts, those in which the giver never expects to receive recognition. Selfless people do the right thing because it's the right thing, or make another's life better by a simple, generous act of kindness. More often, we see those who are happy to do good deeds but who also enjoy a smile for the ever-present camera or to send a press release to the local paper. I don't personally know the man I am writing about, but I will never forget him.

I am an English teacher and the yearbook adviser at Wilson Central High School in Lebanon. The yearbook we produce is truly a professional publication: 328 full-color pages of everything that goes on for 1800 students over the course of the year. However, the drawback to such an amazing book is its cost: \$65. Though some students and parents at our school have no problem paying for the yearbook, it is, at other times, a luxury that some cannot afford.

Back in May of this year, a big friendly man came into the yearbook room, smiled, and said he wanted to buy a yearbook for a student. He was an older gentleman who wore overalls and a big smile. I assumed he was buying it for his grandson, as is often the case, and of course, was happy to oblige. He told me instead that his name was Bob Bell, and he was a bus driver. Mr. Bell wanted to buy a yearbook for a senior boy who had ridden his bus during his high school years. He told me briefly about their relationship over the four years they had ridden together, twice per day, taking the long way around on that big yellow bus to and from Wilson Central.

Mr. Bell said he often worried about the boy and tried to make sure he had eaten and slept well enough. He said the boy wasn't a perfect student, that he often pulled up at the bus stop to find that the boy had been in trouble or suspended for one offense or another. But Mr. Bell never gave up on the student; he took the boy to and from school each day and told me how personally proud he was that the boy was about to graduate. "It wasn't an easy road for him," Mr. Bell said, "but I'm so proud that he's made it, and I wanted him to have his senior yearbook to show his accomplishment."

I accepted Mr. Bell's cash payment for the yearbook, with tears in my eyes that I tried to hold back, and wondered how many miles he had driven, how many kids he had picked up or dropped off, to earn that yearbook for a young man he believed in. I can't remember today whether or not I gave him a hug, but I certainly knew I would never forget Bob Bell's humble act of kindness for a student. I hope that the boy was as grateful for his yearbook as I was for the lesson in how to make a difference in the lives of the young people we are privileged to encounter each day.