

Dear Young Person,

My letter is about the importance of friendship. I bet you have lots of friends. I have a best friend called Stevie Tom and so I thought I would tell you a story about him. He is younger than me, but we used to work together on the buses.

My story goes back to the 1970s when I drove a route master bus to pick up school children from school. On one day my friend Stevie Tom explained he was moving to a new house and needed to hire a van to move his bed and sofa. I said to him, "don't do that, I can use the school bus". I arranged to meet him outside his house, and we started to load the bus. Well, do you know what happened? The sofa got jammed. We were pulling and pushing. In the end I asked Stevie Tom to fetch a screwdriver so I could take out the pole that was preventing us from getting the items on the bus. I was panicking as I was now late to pick up the kids from school and I knew the headmaster called Mr Guggenheim would report me. He was fierce and I was a bit frightened of him myself, let alone the kids! Eventually, we moved the bed and sofa and so I needed a plan as to why I was late. So, I wiped my hands down the side of the bus, so they were black and very dirty and when I reached a very angry Mr Guggenheim, I explained that I had broken down and I had managed to fix the bus.

Later that week, when I was back at the garage, I was told to go and see the gaffer. He was the boss called Norman Meredith. He was an ex sergeant major in the army, he always wore a three-piece suit, and he was even scarier than Mr Guggenheim. He once sent me home as I hadn't shaved, and he sent me home on another occasion for not wearing a hat. You had to look very smart in those days for driving the buses. He said, "I didn't know you were a mechanic?", I said, "I am not sir". He explained that the headteacher had written a letter to praise me for my efforts. I quickly lied and said, "I just lifted the bonnet and banged this and that and I managed to get it working".

I did get away with it. Looking back now, I know that was wrong, but I was helping my friend. I used my initiative; I saw an opportunity and I had to think on my feet.

The next time you take a bus, make sure you treat the driver with respect. They are doing a public duty and they are not invisible. I loved my time working on the buses. I used to get to know the public and they would ask me how my family were doing. I made lots of friends working on the buses too.

As for my friend Stevie Tom, he has never forgotten that day and he is still my best friend. I lost my gorgeous wife in 2014 and that same friend who I helped, has helped me to rebuild my life. Friends are precious, so never take them for granted.

I hope you always have lots of friends

Best

Alan