It was still dark when I made that long walk down the driveway to catch the school bus for the first time.
The driver, Mrs. Johnston, lived nearby so I was one of the first ones to get on and among the last to get off the bus.
It was a little intimidating the first time those big yellow doors swung open, and I climbed the steps to take my first ride to school.
Thirty years later I can still remember it clearly.
Maybe she could see that I was a little nervous, because the sweet lady sitting a few seats back asked me if I wanted to sit next to her.
I gladly accepted her offer, and after a few minutes of conversation I felt right at home. Pretty soon more kids were getting on the bus, and I realized this little ride to school was really no big deal.
I saw her again at lunch time, and she didn't say anything when I came back for seconds on the first day. My teacher had to explain to me later that this wasn't like home. You weren't supposed to go back for another helping.
But Mrs. Veazey didn't mind, and throughout my 12 years of education at Benton Academy she'd always slip some extra French fries on my plate or give me a larger portion of something she knew I really liked.
Back in those days I could use the extra calories. That doesn't seem to be a problem for me anymore.
For Christmas she would make little ornaments for students. I'm not sure if everyone got one or if I was just among a special group. Mrs. Veazey had a way of making you feel special every time you talked to her.
When I was a senior on my last day of high school, I was told to report to the cafeteria. I had no idea why I was being summoned, and I wondered if maybe I still owed some money or something.
When I arrived Mrs. Veazey surprised me with a gift and reminded me of that first time we sat together on the school bus. I couldn't believe she still remembered that after so many years.
That really touched me, and although I wasn't really in the habit of sharing my feelings, I told her so.
Jesse Veazey died Monday at age 71. There is no telling how many kids she served with a smile during her career or how many greasy beef tacos or fried chicken sandwiches were made with loving hands.
When I learned of her passing Tuesday morning, so many memories came back.

I wonder if people like Mrs. Veazey realize how much they touch the lives of others through simple acts of kindness. I wonder if they know how much better the world is because of their presence.
We should all probably do a better job of telling them.