

Quite out of fashion

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There are babies, and their mothers sit sideways on the car seat in order that the blanket-wrapped offspring on their backs may continue to breathe.

There is a very old man, night watchman at a Parkmore school, who seems quite glad of a lift at about nine in the morning or four in the afternoon.

There is a mother-of-five who "does washing" for a Sandhurst household, and a man who comes from Evaton several times a week, carrying a chain saw, to do a day's work in a Morningside nursery.

Nearly everyone seems to have something to carry or care for — a sewing machine, a suitcase, a box of groceries, a toddling child.

Who are all these people, and what is all this leading up to? The answer is, nobody much and nothing much. Except perhaps friends and friendship, for they are among the people you can offer a lift to in the Sandton area. Several women do.

You see, the bus service for Africans is not too bad when it's there, but there are hours and hours in the day, and night, when it is not there at all, and this means long, hot (or cold or wet) trudges for workers who *must* get punctually to their jobs, and away from them as best they can.

There was a young mother a while ago who was carrying a suitcase and a young child whom she'd had to take to a dentist. She had walked over two kilometres in the heat and was so astonished at being offered a ride that she forgot to say thank you. Or maybe she couldn't because she was crying.

An older woman said "God bless you Madam, how can I ever repay you for your kindness?" Oh dear.

One winter evening a man who claimed to be a painter (there are a couple of blue paint spots, quite a pretty shade, on the car seat which would appear to verify his claim) climbed into the car with a grunt of relief, for his equipment was heavy. At the end of the trip he said in the darkness, "I have not even seen your face, but I will never forget you."

Quite a lot of the trips are silent ones, but more often there is cheerful conversation — no, not dialogue, conversation. About children. Or the weather. Or the traffic, a holiday, a church matter. And once, the subject erupting quite suddenly, about the writings of Aldous Huxley.

And you realize you have a great crowd of new friends and you look forward to seeing them again. Danger in offering lifts to strangers? Possibly. But there is also danger in rocketing to the moon, in denying a desperate man the right to live with his wife, or in having a bath in case you should slip on that new cake of scented, expensive Christmas soap and break your neck.

The lift-giving woman whose tale this is has a favourite passenger, a debonair, youngish woman with two children at school, who does daily housework in a Sandown flat.

"I wonder," says the lift-giving woman one morning, "why so many White women are unwilling to offer lifts, especially to African men?"

And the favourite passenger grins and replies, "I wonder too. Perhaps the White madams have not heard that rape, at eight o'clock in the morning, is quite out of fashion!"