

Ode to the Crossing Guard
for Russell, who watches over Edgewood & Monroe

Who asks my son where his sister
has gone to college and how she likes it.
Who waves as if he wants
to hand me a cloud
as I pass his corner morning and afternoon.
Who hands my kids a Mother's Day
card and tells them to sign and give it to me.
Who is happy to hear Northwestern
because I'm from Chicago.
Who yells slow down at the cars

even when there aren't kids waiting to cross
this busy road that killed another cat last night.
Who holds back drivers while
bicyclists escape
another face-to-face with death.
Who never misses a school day.
Who teases my son for not wearing
a coat in the cold then shares the joke
with a shout across the street at me later.
Who has pieced us together over years

of bringing our neighborhood peace.
Who arrives early with his collection
of orange cones then sits in the car
reading the paper until it's time to center
them in his intersection. Who says hello, hello, hello, hello,
each greeting as cheerful as the first. Who calls me young lady.
Who crosses over one afternoon
to gift me with a folded clipping,
pointing at the thumb-sized photo, Isn't this your smiling
face? Whose name I only just now think to ask.

—Wendy Vardaman

