

A Day in the Life

“Val, do you know where Mindy is?”

“I think I saw her heading down the hallway a minute ago, Darren. Why?”

“She wanted to talk to me. She’s a little upset that I gave her son a detention yesterday!”

“Come on, Darren, you should be used to stuff like that by now! After all, this is your fourth year as Principal ...”

“I know. But she’s still a little put out that she never got that Social Studies job a few years ago ...”

“Oh, that’s nonsense, Darren. She’s perfectly happy with the 3/4/5/ class now that Kate is home looking after your kids! I like your bow-tie today, by the way.”

Sometime in his second year as Principal, Darren had taken to wearing bow-ties most days. Although we all thought it looked a little silly when he wore them with just a T-shirt and sports jacket.

“How are your kids doing, by the way?”

“Well”, Darren replied, “Argon and Boron are both walking now. And getting into a lot of trouble. Osmium is just learning his A-B-C’s”

Darren had named his first three children after elements from the periodic table. Kate hadn’t spoken to him for a month after Osmium was born.

“Since this is a PD day, I thought I’d walk around for a bit and see how the staff is doing. Where’s Bonnie, by the way?”

“Oh, she’s out back again, cleaning the pressure washer. Boy, that car wash program she started last year is really taking off!”

“I know. But we really should start charging the staff for using it. Bill is in there all the time getting his yearly new car washed ...”

“Bill seems to be doing OK this year. I think that stress leave did him some good!”

Bill had taken a month off the previous spring due to the stress of his daughter Emily switching majors at college. For the third time.

“I didn’t even know you could become a proctologist at Western ...”

Darren and Val continued to walk down the hallway. Val continued ...

“Oh, and Bonnie’s really upset. Paige is off at college this year, you know.”

“I know, I know. She was moping around here the whole month of June last year.”

“Well, Paige seems to have a new boyfriend. Bonnie doesn’t like him very much!”

“Oh? Why not?” Darren really didn’t want to know. But he had to ask.

“Well, I don’t really think it’s the piercings ... although the skulls on each side of his nose are quite attractive. And the full-length arm tattoos are stunning. No, I think she really isn’t happy with his choice of career.”

“Which is ...?” Darren couldn’t help himself.

“He wants to be a grade 1/2 teacher. She thinks that with Brooke becoming a teacher next year, one in the family is probably more than enough.”

“Oh??”

“Yeah. You know how Brooke is. All she can talk about is formative and summative assessments, inclusion, backwards design ... all that teacher stuff. It’s driving her family crazy!”

“OK, well ... I’m sure they’ll work it out. At least we have a really good grade 1/2 teacher. Let’s stop in there for a moment.”

Darren and Val entered the grade 1/2 classroom. The teacher was standing on a chair, which was balanced on a table. She was hanging pictures of farm animals.

“Melanie! You shouldn’t be doing that! Don’t you remember what our PRSD Health and Safety Officer said at our last semi-weekly meeting?”

The one that lasted an hour and a half, Darren wanted to say, but didn’t. Not a good idea to be cynical in front of the new teacher.

“Oh, Hi, Mr. Phelps. How are you?”

Darren looked pained. “Melanie, look around your classroom. What do you see?”

“Well, ..” Melanie thought for a moment. “I see desks, and whiteboards, and racks of books, and ...”

“No, no. I meant, what do you *not* see??”

“Uh ... well, there’s no blinds on the windows. I’ve been asking for blinds for two weeks now, and ...”

“Melanie! There are no *students* in this classroom!”

“Um, well ... yes, I sort of noticed that, Mr. Phelps. Today is a PD day. Did you forget?”

Darren rolled his eyes. “Melanie, why are you calling me Mr. Phelps when no students are around? We talked about this. You’re part of the staff now. My name is Darren!”

“Yeah, I know. It’s just so hard. I’ll try.”

Val added her two cents. “It makes him feel old. What with three kids and all ...”

“Yeah, that Boron is really cute!” Melanie went back to hanging farm animals.

“Melanie ... oh, never mind. Be careful, OK?”

“I sure will, Mr. Phelps. See you. Have a good day!”

Just then Mindy came out of her classroom, and stormed up to Darren. She wasn’t looking happy.

“Mr. Phelps! Can I talk to you about my son?”

“Uh, sure Mindy. But I don’t think ...”

“It was just a little prank. He didn’t mean anything by it.”

“Mindy, he brought a package of Oreos to school and gave everyone one.”

“I know, but ...”

“And he’d replaced all the white stuff in the middles with toothpaste! At least, I hope it was toothpaste!”

“Well, I still don’t think you should have given him a detention!” Mindy stamped off in a huff.

“OK, that went really well.”

“Darren, don’t be so hard on yourself. Look at all the good decisions you made last year!”

“Well, insisting that all the female staff wear skirts or dresses didn’t go over too well.”

“OK, but ...”

“And the new policy about teachers having to pay for their own whiteboard markers and Smartboard bulbs? That was a mistake.”

“I know, but the budget is pretty tight, and ...”

“And my decision to have all the staff pay for parking went over like a lead balloon!”

“I know Darren, but they’re doing it. Although some of us thought that \$350 per month may have been a little steep ...”

“I don’t know, Val. Maybe I’m losing it. I need some time off.”

“The last time you took some time off Kate kicked you out of the house after three days!”

“It wasn’t my fault! She gets really cranky when her allergies act up!”

“And I suppose that tanning bed that you installed in your living room that you spend all your time in didn’t have anything to do with it?”

Darren had taken to sporting a golden tan all through the winter. But once he’d completely missed the back of his neck, and was two-toned for about two weeks. Osmium took to calling him ‘Zebra Dad’.

“Maybe I’ll just go take a nap instead. But Val ... really ... do you think I’m doing a good job?”

Val just hugged him.