

All the characters in this story are fictitious. Except for Bonnie.

Just Another Staff Meeting

“I see there are seventeen new items on the agenda for today’s staff meeting. Let’s try and get out of here by five, OK?”

I thought Darren was being just a little sarcastic. In a sneaky sort of way. He’s pretty good at that.

“Colleen, sit down. No more. Please!” He’d caught Colleen trying to add another item to the blackboard list.

This was our regular after-school ten minute Monday staff meeting to discuss things that needed discussing. As usual, this one looked like it might take an hour or more.

“All right, let’s start with item one. ‘Locker clean-up’. Who put that one up there?” Darren wasn’t wasting any time.

“Uh ... that was me ...” Colleen seemed a little hesitant. “We need to do it more often.”

“OK ... how come?”

“Well, as you know, the lockers across from the library belong to the grade eight and nine classes ...” Colleen paused for a moment. “The smell ...”

We were all familiar with the problem. The previous Friday we’d had a locker clean-up, and several sandwiches in various states of decay had been unearthed from the detritus at the bottom of a few Junior High lockers. There’d been mould growing on the bottom shelves of several of them. We’d all been wondering what the smell near the library was. We were pretty sure it wasn’t Colleen.

“Yeah, I can see that.” Darren thought for a moment. “How about we have those classes clean out their lockers every day?”

“We may need a few more garbage bins ...” That was Adrien. He was our new Social Studies and PhysEd teacher, and he always had good ideas. He also was constantly sporting a fashionable three-day growth of beard. How did he manage it? Were there razors that would do that?

“Thanks, Adrien. We’ll look into it. By the way, where is Val?”

Bonnie filled us in. “She’s still in the office, on the phone with Amanda.”

“What? She was just talking to her at lunchtime!”

“And this morning too, before classes. She misses her.”

Darren looked puzzled. “But wasn’t she home this weekend ...?”

Bonnie just shrugged her shoulders. We suspected she wasn’t going to say anything else, because she’d been phoning Brooke just as often.

“OK, well ... let’s get back to item two. ‘Smoking’. Who put that ... no, wait a minute. That one’s mine.”

We’d been having trouble with several Junior High boys who were always late for class because they were sneaking out behind the school to smoke. No-one was allowed to smoke on school property any more, and it seemed that this new policy had created dozens of smokers that we hadn’t known about before.

But Darren had a plan. “I think if we rearrange our noon supervision duties a little, we can clamp down on this problem.”

That didn’t sound good.

“Adrien, I’d like you to station yourself out behind the dumpster. And Bill, you can stand out by the baseball diamond. I’ll patrol the perimeter, and Melissa can check out the parking lot. Val, if you’d go up on the roof ...”

Everyone started talking at once. “But what about the hallways?” “Are you kidding? It’s cold out there!” “How long do we have to stand outside?” “You want me on the ROOF?”

I think that some people might have been thinking that Darren was taking this problem a little too seriously. But I’d noticed the small smile on his face.

“OK, I got you with that one! Maybe we can go on to item three now?”

Darren was enjoying his new job way too much.

“The next one’s mine.” Melissa had her hand up.

“Melissa, you don’t have to raise your hand.”

“But Bill said we always ...” She looked at me, confused.

Darren glared at me. “I think Bill may have been ... uh ... leading you astray on that one. You don’t have to raise your hand at staff meetings.”

Melissa was glaring at me now too. “All right, well, ... uh ... I’d like to talk about the ... uh ... toilet paper ... in the women’s washroom?”

Melissa looked a little embarrassed. She was our new science teacher, and was really enjoying her job. But she seemed a little perplexed by the weighty issues we seemed to be discussing at our staff meetings. Which was probably why she was hesitant to talk about toilet paper.

Bonnie helped her out. "I know what she means. That cheap one-ply stuff is awful. It's too thin ... you have to use about half a roll every time you ... er ..." Bonnie stopped in embarrassment. "And it scratches!" she finished lamely.

Darren wasn't sure what to say. But then he had an idea.

"I know what we can do! You know how we're always asking for donations to our breakfast program in the newsletter?" He was looking pleased with himself. "Let's start asking for toilet paper. We can say something like: 'The female staff at WCS are asking for donations of super-absorbent ultra-soft toilet paper for the staff washrooms. Any contributions would be welcome'. How about that?"

Bonnie looked at him. "Never mind. I'll just donate a few cases myself. But just for the women's bathroom. Don't you go sneaking any of it ... you can donate your own."

Sometimes Darren's devious nature just blows me away. He was made for this job!

It was Kathleen's turn next. We were on to item four already, and we were only ten minutes into the meeting. Things were looking up.

"It's about my grade eight and nine music class!"

We'd noticed that many of our staff meeting items seemed to deal with that class. Last week someone had complained that some of them were wearing T-shirts with rude things printed on the front. We'd solved that by keeping a supply of Justin Beiber T-shirts on hand in the office, which we made them wear to cover the offending slogans. We had a whole supply of them that Bonnie had donated when Brooke left.

"What's the problem, Kathleen?"

"Well, it's not a problem, exactly. It's just that I can't keep up. I have three students learning to play the guitar, two practicing the piano, five trying to master the ukulele, four leaning to sing for our choir ... and, oh, yes, Jessie just started on the bagpipes ..."

"*That's* what that noise is!" Adrien taught Social Studies in the room next door. We all sympathized with him. When I'd first heard the bagpipes while walking down the hall, I'd rushed into Kathleen's room expecting to see ... well, I wasn't sure what I'd expected to see. Mindy told me her grade one and two kids hid under their desks every time the bagpipes came out.

“I think I need another three ‘Work Experience’ students” Kathleen continued.

“I’d like to help you out ...” Darren started to explain. “But we don’t ... uh ... seem to have any available at the moment. Maybe next semester.”

What Darren wasn’t saying was that he’d already tried to talk a few of our older students into helping. But the sight of five Junior High boys sitting on the shelves at the side of the room playing the ukulele and singing Lady Gaga songs scared them off.

“OK, how about item five?” Darren was moving right along. Maybe there was a new episode of ‘Dancing with the Stars’ on this evening.

I stood up. I always stood up when talking at staff meetings. It helped keep Mindy awake. And it put me out of reach of Bonnie in case I said something she didn’t like ... she had a tendency to hit first and ask questions later.

“The Student Council would like to hold a Traffic Safety Week again this year.”

There were groans. The last time we’d tried this, most of the ‘traffic tickets’ were given out to the staff. Usually for driving without ‘due care and caution’ ... which translated into trying to hurry to class with an armload of books and a mug full of hot coffee.

I was the Student Council supervisor this year. I wasn’t sure how I was going to do as good a job at it as Darren had been doing for the past five years, but at least I didn’t have to do Grad again. Last year’s Grad class could never agree on anything, and Michelle and Carson were always getting into arguments ...

“Does that mean we have to walk slowly and keep to the right? I hate that!” Mindy was smiling. I think she was joking. Mindy usually bounced down the hallway, hurrying back to her grade one and two classroom. She loved being a grade one and two teacher!

“I think it will be fun. And there will be some new rules this year. For example, kids won’t be able to use their cell phones while they’re walking.”

“Does that mean we can’t either?” Bonnie looked worried.

“That’s right. But that’s a good thing, Bonnie! Besides, think how much more time Brooke will have in class to actually listen to the instructor if you’re not calling her all the time ...”

Fortunately I was standing well out of hitting distance.

“OK, well, thanks Bill. I’m sure it will be a fun week!” Darren was trying to move things along.

I didn't tell him that the kids were planning to ticket him every time he walked down the hallway reading something.

Items six through sixteen dealt with the various sales and fundraisers that were planned for the next month. We got through them pretty quickly, although Kate did have a question about the Senior Girls Volleyball food sale.

"Could I request a different flavour of ice cream this time? We're all getting a little sick of vanilla and strawberry. How about 'rum and raisin'?"

"And pistachio!"

Darren interrupted. "Pistachio would be fine. But we can't sell 'rum and raisin' ice cream."

"Why not? Does someone have an allergy ?"

"No, it's that new PRSD policy ... you know, the one about schools not promoting the use of tobacco or alcohol?"

"But ... surely rum *flavour* ..."

"No, the policy spells it out quite clearly. I believe it was in section 7, subparagraph 14: 'No school or employee of the school division shall in any form or fashion, in writing or by word of mouth, promote the use of alcohol to students, including, but not limited to, the consumption of alcoholic beverages, chocolates containing alcohol, rum and raisin ice cream, scotch mints, or rye bread'." Darren paused, and then continued. "The Board met for three hours to finalize that one. A teacher in Grimshaw has already gotten into trouble for wearing a shirt with 'Bud Light' monogrammed on it.

"Well, I guess that was reasonable ..."

"The teacher's name is Bud. Bud Light. Nice guy. But he can't wear those shirts any more."

Darren looked anxious to get on to the last item. "We need to discuss our upcoming Parent Teacher Interview evenings. Last year, as you know, we had a very poor turnout."

We all remembered that. We'd had a good staff volleyball game in the gym, and Kathleen had finally caught up on all her marking. We got really excited at about seven thirty when a parent actually walked in the door, but it turned to disappointment when she told us she was just here to pick up her son's textbook. We made her stay for half an hour and talk to us anyway.

Darren continued. "I was thinking maybe we could have a spaghetti dinner beforehand ..."

"Oh no! Not again! That will be the fourth spaghetti dinner so far this year, and it's only October! I'm sick of spaghetti!" That was Val. Bonnie was nodding her head in agreement. I could sympathize with them, since the two of them had to do all of the cooking whenever we held a dinner. Well, they didn't *have* to cook ... but they'd volunteered for the job after the last time we'd tried a pot-luck dinner and everyone had brought Nanaimo bars.

"We need *something* to attract parents!" Darren was looking for ideas.

"Maybe Jessie could play the bagpipes ..."

That didn't go over well.

"I have an idea ..." Colleen stood up. I wasn't sure why she was standing ... Bonnie wasn't anywhere near her.

"You know how parents always show up when there's a controversy? Well ... maybe we should start a rumour ..."

"No way!" Kate jumped up. "We did that last year, and people are still sending be baby gifts!"

Colleen grimaced. "No, I was thinking maybe we could start a rumour that we're considering having the kids in grades six and up wear school uniforms. You know, blazers and ties for the boys, and cute plaid skirts and white blouses for the girls ... it will drive them crazy. Every kid will make sure his parents show up, just to find out if it's true!"

You have to hand it to Colleen ... she certainly is crafty. We all loved the idea.

She was the one who'd suggested, several years before, that we start a rumour that the motion detectors and smoke detectors scattered around the school hallways were really secret video cameras! She figured that it would scare the kids into improving their behaviour. It did ... for about a week, until they realized that it was just a joke. Although I was pretty sure that Becca still believed it ...

"OK, well, I guess that wraps up this week's staff meeting!" Darren was already heading for the door. "Oh, and one more thing." He stopped at the doorway. "Everyone's long range plans are due tomorrow. And your Professional Growth plans. And don't forget to fill in your IPP's ... also due tomorrow. Have a good night!" And he was gone.

Principals! You can't live with them. You can't live without them!

