

Send the Pig

“Send the pig!”

That was Mindy. She wasn't too fond of the small pig that Darren kept in his office.

The pig was a leftover from Mindy's 'Bring Your Pet to School' day. We'd never identified the owner; we suspected that a very sneaky parent had decided to 'donate' it to the school.

It wouldn't have been the first time that happened. We may have gained a few new junior high boys that way. That I could understand.

Darren had volunteered to look after the pig over the Christmas holidays ... he promised us that he had no plans for a pig roast. And apparently he'd grown attached to it; he now kept it in his office. There was a little water dish under his desk, and he kept a bag of pig kibble in the safe. Dawn complained that it made the cash box smell like pork sausages.

The pig had the run of the school. Darren claimed that it would help keep the mouse population in check; we'd been overrun with them since that same 'Pet' day. We were constantly being surprised by little whiskered rodent heads that popped out of drawers, cupboards and mailboxes. I'd found one making a nest in my pencil sharpener the other day. Kate was becoming addicted to valium.

Personally, I don't think the pig was at all interested in the mice. Its main occupation seemed to be locating all the rooms with carpets in them and pooping.

Mostly we didn't mind. The kids loved him. And Darren was the Principal ... what could we do?

Melanie, who seemed to have a phobia about pigs, told us she was going to do her practice teaching in Newfoundland.

We were also still finding rabbits occasionally. We were pretty sure we were into the second generation by now; yesterday we'd seen a whole family of little bunnies hopping around the science lab. We think they lived under the fume hood.

It was the bunnies that were causing the problem.

Somehow a few rabbits had made their way into the crawl space above the ceilings. That's where all the wiring for the computers was laid out. It was Bonnie who'd first noticed the problem.

“Bill! We have a problem! You have to do something!”

I'd gotten used to that by now. I didn't hide any more. Besides, Bonnie knew where all my best hiding spots were.

"Half the computers in the computer room are randomly turning themselves off and on!"

"Bonnie, you need to be more specific. Are they turning themselves 'off and on', or 'on and off'?"

Bonnie just glared at me. She tends to lose her sense of humour in a crisis. Which apparently this was, if the look of panic in her eyes was any indication.

I went down to the room with her to take a look. When we got there, sure enough, you could see monitors flicking on, and then off, seemingly at random.

"It looks like a short in some of the wires" I told her. "Don't they go up through the ceiling ...?"

We both looked up. And there, peering down at us through a hole in one of the tiles, was a white-whiskered long-eared rabbit. His nose was twitching, and his beady red eyes were watching us.

"There's the problem" I told Bonnie. "They must be chewing on the wires." In fact, the rabbit in question *did* seem to have a few single marks around its mouth. Or maybe I was imagining it.

"How are we going to get them out of there? The ceiling won't support anyone's weight!"

I was wishing we'd kept a few of the ferrets. Or were they weasels?

Just then Darren and Mindy came in. We explained the problem. That's when Mindy made her suggestion.

"Send the pig!"

It actually wasn't a bad idea. The pig ... Darren called her 'Molybdenum' ... we all just called her 'Molly' ... liked to amuse herself by chasing the bunnies whenever she came across them. Which was often. There were a *lot* of bunnies.

I think she thought she was a Border Collie. Darren had trained her to come, sit and roll over, and claimed to be teaching her to catch a Frisbee. We were sceptical.

But she sure did have fun chasing the rabbits around. My VC class had come to a screeching halt yesterday morning when the pig had chased two rabbits into the room; they'd hopped up onto a desk at the front of the room, and the pig was circling them like a worried mother.

Pigs couldn't hop up on desks. We were thankful for that.

So Mindy's idea had some merit. We could put the pig up in the crawl space, and maybe it would chase all the rabbits out of there. At least we knew it wouldn't chew any wires. It only liked pig kibble and tuna sandwiches.

"Tie a string to her collar so she won't get lost." Mindy was still trying to redeem herself after the 'Pet Day' fiasco. Kate still wasn't talking to her. Apparently most of the escaped mice had taken up residence in her room.

"OK, let's do it!"

Darren usually didn't waste any time when faced with a tough decision. When it was discovered last week that the pressure washer pump was set too high in Bonnie's car wash class, and had peeled all the paint off one side of his truck, he didn't hesitate for a second in deciding to make the school pay for a new paint job. I would have done the same thing.

Darren attached a long length of string to Molly's collar, and boosted her up into the gap in the ceiling tiles. "Go get 'em, kid!" Darren was always looking for ways to show off how smart his pig was.

Most of us had decided it was probably time that he and Kate started having children.

The pig disappeared. We heard some scratching, and then silence. Something dripped onto Mindy's head.

"Darren, your pig is having a pee up there!"

But Darren had gone.

All that day we heard scuffling noises and squeals above the classrooms. Occasionally a rabbit would fall down out of the ceiling somewhere, and go bounding off. Apparently Molly was doing her job. The kids loved it.

Sandy was a little disconcerted when a baby bunny fell into the bowl of taco salad she was preparing for lunch, right in front of her. The bunny didn't mind at all; he stayed there and started munching. Sandy was muttering something about rabbit stew as she started on a new bowl.

By the end of the day the rabbits had stopped falling out of the ceilings. We rounded up all the ones we could find and sent them home with Kathleen. Darren wanted to introduce them to the great outdoors ... rather forcefully, we thought, ... but Kathleen had objected.

“There are coyotes out there! And foxes!”

Besides, it was Grace’s birthday. Apparently Miguel wasn’t going to have a say in the matter; he would just have to learn to live with twenty-three new house guests.

We planned to avoid the restaurant for a week or so, just in case any new items showed up on the menu.

But at four o’clock there was still no sign of Molly.

Darren was frantic. “She’s never been away from home before. She doesn’t even have her favourite blanket!”

It was definitely time for them to have kids.

“Look, Darren, I’m sure she’ll be all right.” That was Mindy.

“Yeah, that’s easy for you to say! It was your idea to send her up there in the first place. What am I going to do?”

“Well, ...”

No-one wanted to suggest that we all go home and let the pig work it out.

We all made our way to the staff room. ‘When in doubt, hold a staff meeting’. That was our motto. It was also our school’s Mission Statement.

“OK, here’s a sign-up sheet.” Darren passed it around. “Fill in whatever times you think you can make it.”

Darren had a sign-up sheet for ‘pig patrol’ duty. Each of us was to spend a couple of hours walking the halls during the night looking for a pig snout poking down through the ceiling tiles. None of us was exactly sure what we were supposed to do if we spotted one.

“I think I’ll spend most of my shift near the staff room. I think Molly might be attracted to the food.” That was Kathleen. She might have been right. Kathleen was smart. But we suspected it was probably because there were couches in the staff room.

“OK, people, let’s do it!” Darren certainly could be decisive. And he really loved that pig.

Two weeks ago he’d returned from Grande Prairie with several bags of clothes for Molly. He’d discovered that the outfits for small dogs at Pet Smart fit Molly perfectly. So we’d been treated to the sight of a small pig prancing down the hallway in denim and leather. And occasionally frilly pink things that we were pretty sure Molly found terribly embarrassing. But who knew. Molly was a pig.

But Molly had gone into the ceiling totally naked. Apparently today was wash day.

That was probably a good thing. If we couldn't find Molly, I'd had visions of workmen renovating the school at some future date, and coming across a little pig corpse.

"Hey, Bubba! Look at this ... a little skeleton dressed in a pink tutu! Too small to be a kid ... what do you think it is?"

The next morning we showed up back at school not quite sure what to expect. We were all bleary-eyed ... except for Kathleen, who apparently had indeed stayed quite close to the staff room. Darren had had to take the last two shifts ... we figured he wouldn't get much sleep anyway with Molly missing, so we'd made him take the 3am to 9am shift.

I met Bonnie by the front door. She said, "I'm going to be really sad if we can't find Molly. I've grown sort of attached to the little thing!"

I couldn't remember the last time Bonnie was sad. She was never sad. Well, maybe that once, when Brooke went off to college. That lasted about two days ... until Bonnie realized she now had a spare room to redecorate.

As we arrived at the office, one by one, Val cautioned each of us to be very quiet. Darren was fast asleep at his desk. Molly was curled up on the floor beside him.

"Molly showed up in the ceiling above the women's washroom," Val explained, "Just after I got here. I climbed up on the seat and grabbed him."

That would explain why her legs were wet. It also explained the wet footprints down the hallway.

She looked down. "I slipped. But don't worry ... I didn't drop Molly!"

"Yes, but are *you* all right?"

"Oh, I'm fine. I'm just happy we found the pig!" She looked towards Darren's office. "After you left last night, Darren was talking about climbing up there himself".

I had visions of the Principal crashing through the ceiling in the middle of a grade 1/2 math class.

OK, I admit it ... I enjoyed that vision. Just a little bit.

"We should send him home to get some sleep. The Superintendent is coming tomorrow, and I know Darren will want to dress up Molly in something special. I was thinking about that red velvet jacket with the black strapless top ..."