

Supporting Charity

It started innocently enough. We'd decided we wanted to raise money for charity. We just didn't realize how hard it would be. Or how embarrassing.

It began in the staffroom. We're almost never in the staffroom, but our weekly staff meetings are sometimes held there. Especially when there's food.

"So I was thinking ... *urp*" Kate was trying to say something, but little pieces of cake kept falling out of her mouth. "Uh ... we need to ... *urp* ..."

"Just spit it out, Kate. What?" Darren was impatient.

"What, the cake??"

"No, what you're trying to say. We're all waiting here!"

"Well. All *right* then!" Kate was miffed.

We really shouldn't have cake at staff meetings. It doesn't lend itself well to discussions. We'd tried donuts once last year, but Melanie ended up eating most of them.

"Here's what my idea is. Why don't we raise money for cancer research by shaving our heads?" Kate finally got it out. There was icing on her nose.

We'd decided that as a staff we wanted to raise money for a suitable charity. We hadn't picked the charity yet. Nor had we decided what we were going to do to raise money.

This was looking like it was going to be one of those really *long* staff meetings.

"I'm not shaving my head again!" That was Dawn. "I did it last time, and I was the only one." She meant the only staff member. Some community members had done it too.

"But you could do it again ..."

"Are you kidding? I looked like a garden gnome! Besides, for two months Ronny couldn't look at me without laughing! And Bonnie got me a can of car wax for my birthday!"

Darren got the discussion back on track. "Well, I like the idea of supporting cancer research. Why don't we go with that, and just decide how we're going to raise the money?"

Darren was good at coming up with ideas to raise money. Just last month he'd organized and run a fundraiser to help pay for repainting his office, after Bonnie and

Jessie had painted it pink and lined the walls with cute little frogs and toadstools. The fundraiser had been a big success, although there'd been some feedback about letting students get tattoos ...

Mindy made a comment. "That's a good idea, Darren. Let's think about it." Mindy was laying it on a little thick. We were still finding the occasional rabbit.

"Why not a supper? Suppers always make lots of money!" That was from Bonnie. She was right. Our dinners always had a good turn-out. Especially when Val and Bonnie cooked.

"No way! I'm not cooking anything else! I'm all cooked out! No more cooking for me!"

"But Val ..."

"I'm not going near that kitchen! Uh uh!"

Val had been cooking non-stop for the past several weeks. Bonnie had found a grant for our breakfast program, but then discovered that we only had two weeks to spend it all, so we'd decided to cook breakfast for all our students. Every day.

No-one was getting tired of the breakfasts, but we'd noticed that Val was starting to smell a little like a pork sausage.

"OK, a supper is out. What else can we do as a staff to raise money?"

Colleen raised her hand timidly. "What about a fun day where the staff collect pledges to do something silly?"

"That could work. What did you have in mind?"

"Well, we could all dress up as each other. Students would have to guess who each of us was. And then we could hold some sort of silly contest at lunch time."

She thought for a moment. "But it would only work if *everyone* on staff participated, and did a really good job with their costumes!"

I was wondering who was going to dress up as me. They'd have to shave off all their hair and grow a moustache. Maybe I could talk Tracy into doing it ...

"I like it! We can draw names to see who each of us gets to dress up as!"

So much for Tracy. And with my luck, I'd draw Bonnie.

The last time I'd dressed up as a woman the girdle had just about killed me. And do you know how hard it is to find a girdle anymore?

“Let’s draw the names right now! I’m so excited!”

It didn’t take much to get Mindy excited. She got excited about garbage clean-up day.

So Darren wrote everyone’s name on a slip of paper. Kate checked them over to make sure he’d actually included his *own* name. He was sneaky that way.

Kathleen put them into a bag, and we each drew one name.

I knew it. I’d drawn Bonnie!

We weren’t supposed to tell anyone the names we’d drawn, but I noticed that Kate was giggling, and Colleen was looking pretty happy.

During the next week, Bonnie looked after the publicity. She made posters and did announcements. All the usual stuff. What we didn’t know then was who else she was contacting.

I don’t know how much effort others put into getting their costumes ready, but I had a hard time with mine. I don’t make a good woman.

The hair was no problem. A big black wig would do the trick. And Bonnie never wore her hair the same way twice in any given month, so it didn’t matter what I did with it.

Making me look like a woman would be more difficult. I didn’t have the right ... er ... shape. I was sort of round in the middle ... somehow I had to end up being round at both ends and *slim* in the middle. Obviously a problem in geometry. Or maybe topology. I was never very good at topology.

There was no way to avoid it. I was just going to have to spend some money.

And the moustache would have to go. Unless I could convince Bonnie to grow one in the next week ... no, I guess not.

But I lucked out. One trip to Value Village netted me a bra, a girdle, panty hose, and a lovely matching green skirt and blouse ensemble, with a pair of no-nonsense comfortable shoes.

Since Hallowe’en was long past, I think the girl at the till may have wondered. Just a little. She looked at me a little strangely when I asked her whether purple or red lipstick would complement my ensemble best.

I was going for a coordinated look.

That evening I experimented. To get the right shape ... that 'round at the top and bottom' thing was tricky ... I stuffed the bra with plastic baggies filled with cornflakes. The girdle took care of the 'slim in the middle' part, but my hips had to be padded with a towel or two.

I wanted an hourglass shape. I think I may have achieved it. But without a full-length mirror in the house, I wasn't sure.

When I went to put on the pantyhose, I realized I'd have to make another sacrifice. Pantyhose looks really funny over leg hair.

An hour and several cans of shaving cream later, my legs were perfectly smooth. The bandaids could come off tomorrow.

Did women do this every day? I'd never noticed. I'd have to ask someone. Or maybe not.

I decided not to shave my armpits. I had to draw a line somewhere. Besides, the blouse would hide them. This is probably more information than you need.

I wasn't going to mess with the makeup. I'd save that for the actual fun day, next week.

The next morning noticed several female staff members gathered in a group at the end of the hall. Kate was walking back and forth, and the others were giving her tips. She was walking funny.

"Kate, is anything wrong?"

She giggled. "Nope. Just practicing walking like a man!"

I couldn't let that one go. "Well then, you should let a man help you. You need to walk with more confidence. Hold your head up. Walk as if you owned the place. Like you can do no wrong!"

I left them laughing uproariously in the hallway. Obviously they didn't appreciate good advice when they heard it.

Our publicity campaign was going really well. It was all about raising money for cancer research, and the kids had come through. Everyone had pledges, and many people in the community were dropping in to give us money. Bonnie was always on the phone, but she wouldn't tell us who she was talking to. She just gave us that innocent smile of hers. Some of us started to worry just a little.

On the day of the fundraiser, I was a little late arriving. Putting on my make-up had taken forever. No wonder Emily had always been late for school!

I'd had to shave off my moustache ... and then I'd had more than a little trouble with the bra. The cornflakes filled it out nicely, but the bags that held them tended to shift around a little once in a while, giving my chest a definite asymmetrical appearance. I was pretty sure Bonnie wasn't asymmetrical. I'd have to keep adjusting things.

The parking lot was full. Full to overflowing. I didn't understand. I'd expected a few parents to show up, but why so many?

It was when I saw the van from CFRN that I realized what Bonnie had been doing.

An entire staff at a school, raising money for cancer research, had apparently been a newsworthy story. It must have been a slow week.

I went into the school wondering what to expect.

Kate was in the hallway, and now I knew why she'd been giggling. She was dressed as Darren. A shorter version of Darren.

She'd got the black spiky hair perfect. And she'd done a good job with the 'Homer Simpson' unshaven look. The bow tie was a nice touch.

Mindy was standing there too. I didn't recognize her at first. She was bald, and she had a moustache. And she was a little round in the middle. Who ...?

OK, I got it. She was me. The rubber 'bald cap' did a good job of hiding her own hair, but I was a little perturbed ... it looked like she'd gone a little overboard with the 'round middle' part.

But Darren interrupted my thoughts. He looked me up and down. "Bonnie, right? Impressive!"

He looked pretty good too. He'd dressed up as Tracy. The short skirt looked fantastic. And he had better legs than I did. But he was showing cleavage. How had he done that??

"Let's go. There's an assembly in the gym, and some people want to interview us. The Post guy is here, and the PRSD Communications person, and even a reporter from CFRN. I think they have a camera too."

"Uh ... who are they interviewing?"

"You and me, of course. And probably a few students as well. Come on, we're late!"

So both of us wiggled our way down the hallway as fast as we could, towards the gym. It's really hard to walk fast in a girdle. I guessed that Darren was wearing one too. He looked decidedly slimmer. At least, in the middle.

I stopped when I saw Bonnie. She looked like Bonnie.

“Why are you ...?”

“Hey, I’m in charge. I don’t have to dress up! Besides, I learned that from you!”

It was true. I’d discovered that when you run things, you can escape having to *do* things. As Grad supervisor last year I’d made sure that everyone else volunteered to do all the work. And when nobody volunteered for something, Michelle did it.

We were all missing Michelle. I’d have to send her a ‘care package’ one of these days. Maybe some things with cows on them.

But I’d have to be careful. Amanda hadn’t appreciated the autographed photo of Moe I’d included in her parcel. And I’d worked hard to get that!

We passed Colleen and Kathleen along the way. They hadn’t dressed up! But ... wait a minute! Now I got it. They’d dressed up as each other!

I was impressed. From a distance, you couldn’t tell! The Kindergarten kids were going to have fun with this, I could see.

We reached the gym. I didn’t want to go in. Darren made me.

Staff members were lined up along the walls. All the students were there, and what looked to be hundreds of parents and community members.

And there was a camera set up right in front of the microphones.

I was thinking that this may have been payback by Bonnie. I’d always suspected she hadn’t been too thrilled with all those stories I’d been writing about her.

Darren spoke first. He had to wait for the laughter to die down. I’m pretty sure they were all laughing at him. I think.

“The staff of Worsley School is pleased to announce that we have raised over five thousand dollars in pledges for cancer research!”

I was pleased too. Maybe this would all be worthwhile.

“Mr. Willis, could you please step up to the microphone with me?” I’d sort of been hiding in the background. My pantyhose was itchy.

I noticed that there was now someone behind the camera. And another guy holding some sound equipment and wearing headphones.

A woman stepped forward to ask us some questions.

“I have a question for the Principal ... uh, ... Darren Phelps. Is that correct?”

Darren stepped forward. He didn't look at all embarrassed, despite the mascara that was starting to run down his cheeks. And it looked like his girdle had slipped a little ... he was starting to look more like a bowling pin.

“Go ahead”.

“Whose idea was it to hold this wonderful fundraiser for cancer research?”

Darren indicated that it had been Colleen. She waved.

“Your costumes are quite spectacular. You are supposed to be ...?”

He indicated Tracy, who promptly turned beet red. And I think she may have been upset about the cleavage. How did he *do* that??

“And you're Mr. Willis, the Assistant Principal?”

“Uh, yes ...” I felt my chest start to shift, so I grabbed both parts of it and tried to make an adjustment. Surreptitiously. That wasn't easy.

The guy with the sound equipment ripped off his headphones and winced. “I can't hear anything. All I'm getting are crackling noises ...” He put his headphones back on.

“Uh, yes ...” I felt the left half of my chest sink even lower. I grabbed it and yanked upwards. Even I could hear the crackling this time.

The corn flakes.

The sound man removed his headphones and came up to me. He grabbed both sides of my chest and lined them up. I thought that was pretty rude.

“Don't move, OK?” He returned to his spot.

Just about then I felt, rather than heard, some snapping in the small of my back. The fasteners on the girdle were slowly coming undone. There was no way I could fix that.

The last few hooks gave way with a noticeable 'sproinggg', and my middle resumed its normal round shape. Unfortunately the skirt had only fit with the girdle done up tightly, and its buttons popped. The skirt immediately fell to the floor.

The interviewer's eyes popped.

Fortunately the pantyhose held. I quickly pulled the skirt up and held it with one hand. The other hand was busy supporting my left chest, which was threatening to sink to the level of my waist. The shoulder strap had come off. Corn flakes weren't that heavy, were they?

Darren rescued me. "You'll have to excuse Mr. Willis. He's having a small wardrobe malfunction. If you have any more questions, I'd be happy to answer them.

So Darren took the rest of the interview. When it was over, we both wiggled our way over to the side wall. I was definitely leaking corn flakes by now.

Several students were interviewed, as well as Bonnie. She praised everyone for their efforts at collecting pledges.

After everyone left the gym, we tried to resume normal classes. I'm not sure if the kids learned much. I mostly hid out in the staffroom. The logarithms could wait until tomorrow.

At noon we discovered that the activity was a pie-throwing contest, with the staff as targets. We'd done that before. Piece of cake! Uh ... pie.

Darren and I were up first. No plastic bags to cover us. Just us, sitting on chairs. Fortunately there were no cameras, and most of our visitors had gone home. It was just staff and students.

We both tried to cross our legs demurely. Darren succeeded, although the dress he was wearing was really short. I sincerely hoped he was wearing underwear.

I had a little more trouble. The skirt wouldn't stay up, and the girdle had fallen to my knees. It seemed to be lodged there. But I did manage to sit down.

"I want to go first!" That was Jessie. I knew what was coming.

She'd never forgiven Darren for painting over all her carefully created frogs and toadstools. He got the first pie right in the face.

Bonnie was next. She must have been upset about the costume. That's all I can figure out. In any case, she didn't throw the two pies she held in her hands. She came up and pushed them both into my face. But she was smiling when she did it.

"I am NOT asymmetrical!" she whispered in my ear. The one that wasn't covered by pie filling. And she smiled again.

OK, I've learned my lesson. No more stories about Bonnie.

But Mindy, on the other hand ...