

TELLING TALES OUT OF SCHOOL

Chris Lowe and friends

Number 49

A Good Job

It may seem odd, but some students can be just too good, too friendly, too anxious to please. They can cause distress, even despair....simply because you fear on their behalf threats that they do not begin to imagine. Hence they can be prone to pranks, to exploitation, to bullying.... but not care about it. It is you, the teacher, the mentor, the guardian who cares. They will sail blithely through life's vicissitudes unaware of the panic in their wake. They are not irritating – that's a negative feeling – they are more....shall we say, anxiety-inducing. You just want them to be safe...cared for....happy. And teachers worth their salt will strive to do just that.

One such student Marcus Brampton remembers with great affection. He had never encountered a young person so determined to be helpful to parents, relations, teachers, school secretary, lab assistants, caretaker...bus drivers.....in fact everyone he came into contact with... so much so that it made all of us charged with teaching and caring for him very nervous when we saw him coming.

He was lovely...but trouble travelled in his wake. His teachers knew... just about... how to handle the social dangers that his approach to life engendered. People who did not know him or anyone like him could be in for a surprise.

George was doing work experience at a local hotel. Marcus made sure the Head of Special Educational Needs had briefed the manager on George's autistic tendencies (which at that time were not so well understood as now... in fact not understood at all by many teachers.)

On his first morning, Courtney Hilton, the manager, told George he could start by simply Hoovering the conference room carpet ready for an afternoon meeting. The manager watched him for a while and satisfied that all was going well, left the room. Then due to pressure of work he forgot all about George until lunchtime. When he returned to the conference room three hours later, he found George still Hoovering the carpet.... which is, after all, what he had been told to do....The carpet was by now extremely clean... never been so shiny.....but totally threadbare....through to the floor in the centre. The manager blanched, gulped and with great presence of mind, turned off the power, thus curtailing further activity.

'Jolly good, George.....'

'Oh, thank you, sir.'

'it's....er.... really clean, isn't it?'

'It certainly is, sir. I had some trouble with the curly patterns but no dust here now, sir.....Have you got any more carpets you want Hoovering? I'm quite into it now.'

'No, no...that's all the cleaning we need.....I suggest you go....er...'

In truth Courtney Hilton had no idea at all what he was going to do. He could not countenance any more threadbare carpets, and no immediate thought came into his whirring brain at that moment. He seriously

considered sending George back to school, but decided that it would be devastating for the lad, and for him, too. He wanted the boy to succeed.... But at what?

George needed supervision, that's for sure. The kitchen! That's the place. A word to chef Pierre and George would be watched with a hawk's eye. Pierre scrutinised every move in his kitchen. Oodles of washing up to be done.....lots of fetching and carrying and stocking shelves. He was sure that Pierre was the man. George would be safe there...and so would the hotel.

So, off he went.

On his way to the kitchen George, who was wearing the hotel's distinctive white shirt and black waistcoat, passed through the dining room where two senior executives from the hotel chain head office were having lunch. Although no direct announcement was made, Courtney knew they were doing their annual inspection of luncheon service.

One of the executives spied George and hailed him. 'Excuse me. Could you get us some more bread.'

'Certainly, sir,' replied George, very proud to be of service. He bowed, which was immediately impressive... and strode off through the kitchen door.

Moments later Manager Hilton arrived at the main dining room, full of good cheer, all thoughts of threadbare carpets now banished. Mrs. Duerden, the housekeeper, had assured him that she had been waiting months for an excuse to get a new carpet for the meeting room. Mrs. Duerden was ecstatic.... so Manager Hilton was now in seventh heaven.

Just as Mr. Hilton came through the door George was emerging from the kitchen through the swing doors that divided kitchen and dining room.... and was bearing down on the executives' table. Fine.... the decision seemed to be working... but then Courtney did a double-take....and stopped abruptly in his tracks..... On the plate George was holding poised at shoulder height in true waiter fashion, was a single loaf.....a one metre-long square catering loaf, the sort restaurants use to slice rounds of bread for toast or to crumble for bread-crumbs. Courtney stood agog.

George had been asked to provide bread.... and bread he would provide.

All the manager could do was watch George approach the executives' table with a smile. He continued to stand, mouth open and mind again whirling, transfixed by the scene unfolding before him. Then in a burst of enlightened frenzy he rushed to the table just as George was presenting the loaf.

'Gentlemen!' cried the manager, interposing himself between loaf and guests. 'Let me explain...We thought you might like to see how fresh our bread is. George has kindly brought it for us. Now would you like to sample a crusty piece.... or a slice from the centre?'

'Well, that's very novel and very thoughtful of you,' said the senior man. 'Never given much thought to the uses of catering loaves before. Well done.'

' And well done to you, young man,' he added to George. George bowed again.

And so George got an accolade from the representatives of Head Office, and then a cash bonus, a crisp £20 note, from the hotel manager.... a classic example of not just damage limitation but damage aversion! Everyone was happy. In management-speak it had turned out to be a 'win-win situation'.

A few years later when George had left school and had undergone a series of therapies that were at the cutting edge at the time, Marcus met him in town and in the course of their conversation Marcus asked if he remembered the success of his work experience.

'I've always remembered it sir,' he said. 'At the time I could not understand what all the fuss was about. Why on earth I should get a cash bonus for just doing the job. I was asked to get more bread and that is what I did. If they only wanted slices or rolls they should have said so. But it is nice to know that employers can be so generous. That's what I think was so special about the event.'

As Marcus shook hands with him and wished him well, George stopped him. 'I am sure you would like to know that I framed the £20 note. It reminds me of how thoughtful employers can be.'
