

TELLING TALES OUT OF SCHOOL

Chris Lowe and friends

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The Unexpected Parent

Normally parents are impressive examples of motherly and fatherly care and thoughtfulness. They are also - in the main - appreciative of all that teachers are achieving and intending to achieve. But naturally their first thoughts are for their children's welfare and development. This can lead to occasional conflict which, one hopes, will be sorted out in a civilised and caring manner.

But there were other attitudes and approaches...Some parents are, shall we say, headstrong...and prone to defy the normal rules of civilised engagement. They simply do not believe that there can be any interpretation of the course of events other than their own. And that can lead to extreme panic behaviour in Heads, in response....as Marcus Brampton found out early in his headship career.

Bernard Riley, the son of a local builder, an Irishman, bunked off PE, walked to the building site where his very tough and uncompromising dad was working, and told his pater that he had been subjected to the very worst, severe form of backside punishment (when such things were still legal) delivered by the PE master, Mr. Wilkins. Without enquiring further Dad downed tools and roared into school on a very fast motor-bike, leaving son to find his own way home. Father eschewed the etiquette of calling in at Reception and was spotted by the alert receptionist, Angie, hot-footing it down towards the gym area.

Now, telephones in schools at that before-mobile-phone time were in short supply. Only the Head, the school office, and occasionally the staffroom were eligible, but in Marcus's school the Head of PE, Adrian Wilkins, had a phone simply because his office was in the boys changing room and the school's female secretaries would be obliged to run the gauntlet of naked males to carry any of the myriad of calls that PE teachers receive.

And so, on getting the news Marcus leaped into action, crying, 'Leave it to me!'

He made a frantic call down to the PE department, confident that this decisive action would save the day..... only to find that Sod's Law was in play - the phone line was engaged. The 'idiot', as Marcus unfairly branded his unknowing Head of PE, was at that moment conversing with someone else.

'Get off the b....line!' Marcus shouted vainly down the phone. The engaged ringtones were still mocking him the next time he tried.

'O Lord,' he cried....to himself.... 'there'll be blood everywhere!'.....Then he noticed Deputy Vera standing in his doorway. 'Mr. Riley is trying to sort Adrian out. We have to stop him!....What on earth was the idiot playing at beating a boy when it is against the school rules..... there'll have to be an inquiry!'

'Don't worry about that now,' cried Vera' and she disappeared from sight.

'Where's Vera gone?' Marcus asked himself, 'Just when I needed her.'

There was nothing else for it someone had to beat Mr. Riley to it. The 'someone' had to be him. So off he set. As he passed Reception he shouted, 'Follow me, Angie..... and you Brenda! You stand by to ring the police!'

By then he was off down the corridor. He passed Mac, head of Languages, who had come to the classroom door to find out what the noise was about.

'Mac, it's Adrian – Mr. Wilkins. He might be being assaulted by a parent!' Mac joined the chase.

'Come with us,' cried Marcus again as he saw Dance teacher, Jenny, floating along the cross-corridor. Jenny, not knowing precisely what was happening, tagged onto the rear. Marcus turned right and left the corridor via an outside door to take a shortcut across the playground. His growing team of helpers also turned right and followed behind.

Meanwhile Mac had noticed caretaker, Walter, with brush and pan, and told him Adrian had been attacked; Walter had told Art teacher, Tabitha, whom he saw coming out of a cupboard that he had it on good authority that Adrian was mortally wounded, Tabitha whispered to her heart-throb, Tim from Information Technology.... who was also emerging from the cupboard.... that there was blood all over the gym floor. She then assured both her own class and two others that school was in lockdown and they should not move....but not to panic. Of course, they immediately did...and Assistant Head, Muriel, had take charge and bang on a desk to quieten them down.

Marcus and his cohort raced across the playground. It was now reminiscent of a scene from the Pirates of Penzance. The motley crew reached the main gymnasium door. No frothing Irishman had been spotted. Drat! He had beaten them to it. Marcus put up his hand. The cohort concertinaed into a milling phalanx and gathered round the door.

Marcus signalled for silence and tiptoed cautiously towards the male changing room door. As he was about to grasp the handle the door was flung open and there stood mighty Miss Cameron, Kelly Cameron, Head of Girls PE. Marcus and Kelly eyed each other. Miss Cameron's eye arched and eyebrows lifted as she peered first at Marcus and then at his bodyguard, two of whom appeared to be caretaker Walter carrying a brush and pan like a cutlass and shield and behind him young assistant caretaker Mildred brandishing a bristling yard brush and a galvanised bucket thrust in front of her like a Roman scutum. .

'What are you doing in the Boys changing room, Miss Cameron?' asked Marcus rather lamely. 'You shouldn't be in there, should you? The boys might be.... somewhat dishevelled.'

'Goodness me, Headmaster....there's nothing in there I haven't seen before. If you provide a gym with such a daft layout you mustn't be surprised if we make our own rules...anyway, that's not why you are here, is it?'

'No, it isn't! Follow me!' He waved his arm to his followers and swept past Miss Cameron. The whole legion burst in on 50 Year 10 boys completely naked, coming out of showers and going into showers, swishing towels around their bodies or someone else's body. Dancer Jenny pirouetted to take in the whole scene at one turn.

Marcus turned to his receptionist. 'Take note of what is going on, Miss Terry! I want every detail recorded.'

Receptionist Angie Terry let out the mildest of screams. Her hand went to her eyes but leaving sufficient gap between the first and second figure – in order not to miss vital details.

'Now, where is he?' demanded Marcus, swivelling round to survey the whole room.

'Where's who?' asked Gupta, whose towel was held so low that Marcus was forced to lift it up before he answered. 'Mr Wilkins, of course, and a parent, a Mr. Riley.'

'Oh,' said Gupta, thoughtlessly whipping off his towel and rubbing his tousled hair. Angie's eyes opened wider. 'They left here just before you arrived.'

Marcus stifled a gasp....'That is what I was about to tell you, Headmaster,' said Miss Cameron, 'if you had nt pushed past me in that unseemly fashion. Mr. Wilkins has taken Mr. Riley up to the staff room work areafor a chat. He asked me to keep an eye on the boys getting to their next lessons. I could have told you all that if you had paused.'

Marcus looked round while his brain caught up with him. 'A chat! So Riley wasn't beating the living daylight out of Mr. Wilkins then?'

'I have no idea what you are suggesting, Headmaster. They seemed as thick as thieves to me. Laughing and smiling they were.'

'Laughing and smiling?... Laughing?.....Smiling?.... is that what they were doing...?'

Marcus looked around. His legionnaires obviously wanted a lead. 'Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. It seems that our prompt action has averted a disaster.'

Marcus left his crew looking bewildered, and bounded off to the staff workroom. There he found Head of PE and Mr. Riley....and Deputy Vera, seated round a coffee table, sipping tea. Nobody appeared to be shouting at anybody else.

Marcus stood in the doorway. 'I do apologise for

Vera cut him off. 'I have just explained to Mr. Riley that you were doing playground duty, headmaster. And we have also explained the school's policy of 'no corporal punishment...'

'Ah, yes. I must assure you, Mr. Riley, that the school does not condone any.....' Marcus began.

'...And we've EXPLAINED that there was NO corporal punishment administered to his son....'

'What?....No.... you have what?...so what was it then?' Marcus felt that he was fast losing control, unaware that he had already lost it .

Adrian Wilkins now joined in. 'I have explained to Mr. Riley, sir, that young Riley simply never turned up for PE at all. He just left the school....disappeared...I did try telephoning you, headmaster, but you were engaged...so I sent a note to the office....'

'Yes, I put it into your in-tray,' said Angie, who had now caught up and was standing behind Marcus. 'While you were on the phone.'

'Oh...right....Well, may I suggest Mr. Riley that you pursue the matter a little further with your son.... In a friendly sort of way. Bring him back to school and we'll sort it all out, eh?'

To his credit Mr. Riley did just that, and a day later errant son apologised to the PE teacher, the Head, and Vera.'

There had been no corporal punishment. Bernard owned up to simply bunking off school because he did not like PE. and in particular he absolutely hated changing into shorts and plimsolls in a cold changing-room. After his session with father he felt more inclined to 'give PE a try.' Marcus let him off with a mild caution. Life returned to normal.

Next day, at their morning meeting Vera asked casually. 'Why haven't you punished Bernard at all for breaking the rules. It might make things difficult for staff, you know. They deserve an explanation.'

Marcus ran his hand through his hair – as he did when harassed.

'I'll explain it at the staff meeting this afternoon....I'll give them a good reason.....but I'll tell you the real reason, Vera.' He paused and gathered his thoughts.

'The truth is that I also hated PE in my youth.....and I, too, bunked off school one day.... and once it dawned on me that Bernard's since was my sin.....well I just could not be hypocritical.....I know you will tell me that my position is different now, Vera...but that's the truth of it...and having let Bernard off I feel as though a weight has been lifted from me. Forgive me if you can.'

Vera said nothing. She got up and made for the door...Marcus watched her in sadness....she turned and faced him...'Let me just say this, Marcus....I did just the same when I was a teenager.... I am so glad you did what you did.'
