

THE BILL SMILEY COLUMN

FIG LEAVES INSTEAD OF SLACKS?

By Bill Smiley

I have just got home from something as rare and delightful as a personally conducted tour of Buckingham Palace — a teachers' staff meeting that lasted only half an hour. This is equivalent to building the Pyramids in three weeks.

Meetings, as such, are a particular annex in hell for anyone who has been in the newspaper business and attended at least one, and sometimes two, every working day of the year.

Ninety-five percent of meetings are unnecessary, unenlightening, and unproductive. They are the refuge of bores of both sexes, who take out their personal frustrations by frustrating everyone else. These people have their little dinkies: Raising points of order; moving amendments to the motion; and haggling for interminable times over items that could be solved in eight seconds by a three-year-old with two heads.

Occasionally, a meeting produces sparks, a clash, a conflict of personalities or ideas that light the Stygian gloom. I well remember one town council meeting. One of the councillors, somewhat the wear for something or other, called one of the other councillors, "a gibbering old baboon." A nice thrust.

He wasn't too far off the mark, but was in no condition himself to hurl such charges. The offended party promptly started peeling off his jacket, and offered to thrash the other "within an inch of your life." The other councillors, and even the mayor, quailed. Chiefly, because both councillors were well into the seventies. I might add that the only blood shed was verbal. But that was a meeting.

Staff meetings are not quite that bad, but they inevitably produce in me a headache so fierce that only a great dollop of some sedative beverage can allay it.

I've seen adults haggling bitterly for half an hour over the chewing of gum. Where it could be chewed, when it should be chewed, and how it should be chewed (open mouth or closed.) The only result was that the kids went on blithely chewing gum, wherever, whenever and however they could get away with it.

Deep moral, social and psychological issues are involved in a problem of this magnitude. Is gum bad for the teeth? What do you do if you send a kid to the office, he removes his gum on the way, and swears angelically that it was the teacher's imagination, that he was really chewing his cud out of sheer nervousness? Is it better for the student to chew gum than to chew his fingernails down to the blood?

"Jesus wore long hair and a beard, didn't he?" How do you counter this one (a favorite, by the way, among male students)? Do you say, "Uh, well, uh, Jesus, uh, THROW THAT GUM IN THE BASKET!" Or would you say, "O.K., Buster, turn that blackboard into an ouija board."

This particular staff meeting was about girls wearing slacks. Human experience has showed that girls will wear whatever other girls are wearing. And girls, these days, are wearing slacks. They are comfortable, they can look smart, they are warm in our frigid winters, they prevent boys from peeking up the stairs as the girls ascend in mini-skirts, and they have probably contributed more to containing the population explosion than the old-fashioned night-dress.

Anyway, I expected a marathon. About three hours. They can wear slacks, but only once a week. They can wear slacks, but they can't wear blue jeans. Nobody in my class is going to wear slacks. If it's all right for the boys to wear blue jeans, why can't the girls. And so on.

It was fantastic, but the openly, and bluntly expressed feeling of the majority was that girls should be allowed to wear whatever was in style. And that was that.

One commercial teacher, who could have been expected to come down heavily on the side of "no slacks," said she didn't care if they wore fig leaves as long as they were "neat and tidy."

I'd like to hear what you think about long hair, girls wearing slacks, and all the other things that were unacceptable in our day. Drop a line.

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the mentally retarded, the deaf and the blind. Many volunteer hours are dedicated to helping the sick, the lonely and the elderly — visiting veterans in hospitals, caring for families when the mother is ill, offering friendship and help to shut-ins, and meeting the needs of senior citizens by providing "meals on wheels", organizing fitness and recreation programmes and making them feel part of the community. For many elderly people who would not otherwise venture outdoors, the Red Cross has supplied wheelchair service and transportation to hospital clinics for treatment, or to public gardens, art showings, theatres or zoos for recreation.

Many women volunteers use their talents to make layettes, bedding and articles of clothing for the victims of disasters at home and abroad. They also prepare millions of cotton swabs for use at blood donor clinics.

It is through the financial support of the Canadian public that the articles used for operating these services are purchased and maintained — the sewing machines, the wheelchairs, the instructional aids for the teaching of care in the home and water safety, the items loaned to the public from the Red Cross sick-room equipment loan cupboards and the special apparatus necessary for the teaching of the handicapped.

ALEX TREBEK



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The Red Cross will need approximately one million blood donations in 1971 to meet the needs of patients in Canadian hospitals.