
A RARE QUIET AFTERNOON

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“Class,” Ms. Woods announced, smoothing her navy-blue pencil skirt, “open your enrollment books to page three and read the first paragraph with me.”

While the counselor explained the enrollment procedure to my 30 juniors, I grabbed a stack of papers from a nearby shelf. Then I sat at my desk at the back of the room with my red pen and started grading.

I enjoyed having the counselor visit my room. She was in total control of the students, and I could relax and grade a few papers. Today she came to my portable for the last class of the day. I sighed and smiled, ready for a rare quiet afternoon.

Before long, however, I noticed Julia and Emma at the front of the room with their heads together, talking. Since they were generally well behaved, I was surprised and disappointed by their talking. I waved my hand to catch their attention, put my finger to my lips and gave them “the look” to quiet them. In unison they mouthed to me, “There’s a mouse.” They pointed to the side of the room where the rodent wandered.

The mouse seemed oblivious to the 32 people in the room and continued exploring. It rambled past my desk and jumped onto a low bookshelf, sniffing at the stacked papers resting there. I sure didn’t want it darting past my feet, so I stopped grading papers and kept close watch on its progress.

Julia and Emma kept turning their heads away from the counselor to see where the uninvited little guest had wandered. Other students, curious to know what the girls were watching, turned their heads and spotted the furry creature on the bottom shelf. Soon seven or eight of us scrutinized the mouse’s explorations. The counselor, fortunately, had not noticed the little intruder. Yet.

Gradually, more and more students detected the meandering mouse, and more heads turned to look where it explored. After sniffing one stack of papers, it hopped down and moved to the next shelf, unmindful of all the watching eyes. Next, it nosed around some books before moving on.

Noticing the students’ inattention, Ms. Woods impatiently tap, tap, tapped the toe of her three-inch heels and raised her voice. “Class,” she said, “pay attention. Now this is important. If you want your schedule correct next year, follow my directions exactly.”

By now our little guest had traveled the length of the room. He had nowhere else to explore. Then he made his fatal mistake. Instead of wandering back the way he had come, he bolted toward the front of the room, right between two rows of desks. Chaos erupted.

All 12 students on either side of the streaking mouse jumped out of their seats and screamed. Jaelyn and Marissa jumped on top of their chairs. Terrified of the mouse, Bradley jumped high in the air to get away from it. As he landed, he inadvertently kicked the mouse into a desk leg, killing it. Now that the mouse no longer scurried about, Bradley was fearless. With a yell of triumph, he grabbed the tail and picked up the tiny troublemaker, raising it triumphantly in the air. The girls screamed, and the boys yelled in victory; they had defeated the beast. Thirty loud voices echoed around the room.

With her hands waving in the air above her head and her mouth wide open, Ms. Woods was the first to run out of my portable classroom screaming, her three-inch heels clomping on the wood

floor. In a mad rush, the girls scurried out right behind her, their arms above their heads too, their screams piercing the air. Right behind them dashed the boys, thumping their chests and yelling triumphantly. They carried their trophy—the dead mouse—and jubilantly celebrated their successful hunt. Within a matter of seconds, I stood alone in my now empty room.

Following them outside, I saw Mr. Miller, the teacher next door, running down the stairs from his portable, looking panicked. “What happened?” He yelled above all the chattering voices.

I shrugged my shoulders and said, “A mouse.”

The poor man had heard all the commotion and thought there had been a riot in my class. “Oh,” he said, shaking his head and grinning in relief as he returned to his students.

My students all chattered at once, giving their own accounts of the story. It took a few minutes to calm them enough to return to my room.

The counselor refused to enter the portable, even though the mouse was dead. “No way,” she said, hands on her hips, “you won’t get me back in that room. Not with a mouse!” She ordered one of the students to retrieve her enrollment materials from the room and hustled into the main building toward the mouse-free safety of her office.

With lots of excited chitchat, the students and I filed back into the room and spent the last few minutes of class reliving the excitement.

“Did you see that mouse bolt for the front of the room?”

“Ms. Woods is afraid of mice!”

“Yuck. That was gross!”

“Man, Bradley was so quick. He kicked that mouse to its death.”

After the closing bell rang and the students rushed out the door to tell their friends about the mouse adventure, I sat quietly for a few rare moments. Then I walked to the low shelf to grab a stack of papers to grade at home. After checking to make sure our tiny guest hadn’t left any unwanted deposits, I picked up the papers and retrieved my purse and keys.

As I locked the door to my room and headed to the parking lot, I sighed and smiled. Thanks to our uninvited guest, my quiet afternoon would have to wait until the weekend. I did have to admit; however, even though it wasn’t quiet, it was certainly a rare afternoon.

***To the best of my ability, I have related an event that actually occurred in my classroom. Names have been changed to protect the innocent.

Author Biography

After teaching English at Wichita Heights High School for 21 years, Nancy Sturm has pursued other interests in retirement. At last, she has had time to read and write more, to learn to tap dance and line dance, take long walks in the woods, and spend as much time with family as possible. Mrs. Sturm has spent years since retirement working as a University Supervisor at Wichita State University, hoping to pass along a bit of wisdom to the next generation of teachers. If you are a *Chicken Soup for the Soul* fan, you may have read some of Nancy’s writings in their books. She also has published over a dozen devotions and has written a collection of meditations which she hopes will find a publisher. You can contact Nancy at nancy.h.sturm@gmail.com. Read some free devotions (or listen to the audio versions) at her blog, <https://inspirational-author.com>.