

CLASS ACT

by Robert L. Crowe



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TCH (teacher): I'm not looking for sympathy. It's my own fault. I chose teaching as a career and stayed with it for many years. Like anyone else's job it had its starts and stops, jolts and jerks. There was one thing ... perhaps I shouldn't call her a thing ... there was one element that made my career unique. I began teaching in primary grades, then taught upper elementary, then junior high and finally, senior high ... and all of them in the same community. The up-shot of this is that my students followed me ... maybe "stalked" is a better choice of words. I would move up, they would catch up. Over the years, students moved in and out of my classes ... but there was always Susan. I met her in first.

SUE: *(as a first grader)* Why do we have to hold our hand up? We don't have to hold our hand up at home when we want to talk and we get along fine. My daddy holds his hand up when he says he's going to smack the dog, who's always barking, but he never really hits the dog. He's just kidding ... I think. My doggie is white and leaves hair all over the house.

TCH: What was your question, dear?

SUE: I don't remember.

TCH: *(to audience)* I now know where my mistake was. I told the students in first grade that education was a process of questioning. It is the only thing I taught them that they never forgot.

SUE: If milk comes from cows, where do milk cartons come from?

TCH: Uh ...

SUE: Why do erasers erase?

TCH: Ohhhhhh ...

SUE: Do we have to eat all our lunch if we think we're going to throw up?

TCH: NO! (*pause*)(*to audience*) In education we often design experiences and then hold our breath. Art class is one of those ...

SUE: Freddy's eating my paste! Make him eat his own paste!

TCH: ... show and tell is another.

SUE: This is a picture of my cat. She had kittens so mom had her shoveled.

TCH: Then there are report cards and conferences ...

SUE: Miss _____. I don't want to worry you, but my dad said if I got a bad report card, someone was going to get spanked!

TCH: I have a BA degree. It was after teaching only a little while I learned what a BA meant. It means "Barely Adequate." No textbook or class in college ever prepared me for so many situations.

SUE: My daddy says you're so young he bets your degree is from Mattel.

TCH: One is really not prepared to respond to everything that happens. That's when I learned the "smile and nod" approach. It has served me very well over the years. (*pause*) When I went to the intermediate grades, the student interaction really didn't change. It just seemed to get more complicated.

SUE: (*gets up from chair, walks to front of class*) My report is on the planets. I think there *used to be* life on other planets, but their scientists were more advanced than ours. If the comic books are right, we only have about 200 more years. The end of my report. (*sits*)

TCH: Nestled in with the grammar and geography, we try to teach good social interaction. In addition to emphasis on everyday family life, I once organized a unit on personal relationships. We did a lot of small group work. "Now, Susie ... from all your discussion, tell us what you've learned about your class mates."

SUE: I've learned that almost everyone gets a bigger allowance than I do.

TCH: When I was young, I was taught to respect my elders. Now, I'm told to listen to the youth. When's my turn? I think I missed my turn. *(pause)* There's a rumor that if you teach junior high for 10 years, the insurance companies will accept that as absolute proof of permanent brain damage. I tried academic instruction in junior high for a few years.

SUE: *(smacks gum, shifts weight)* ... Well, you know I think it's because I told my parents that a D minus in Health meant that I have a deficiency in vitamin D, so they bought me enough vitamin pills to last me 'til my next report card. Say ... if Bobby McWaters has to stay after school, can I stay, too?

TCH: We had to teach a variety of subjects. My main interest was English. "Susie, what is the title of the book you are reading?"

SUE: I haven't got that far yet.

TCH: But I had to teach math, too.

SUE: It's fractions that I have trouble with *(tries to get the grammar correct)* ... which with I have ... with I have which ...

TCH: Never mind the grammar for the moment, what is the trouble ... the other trouble?

SUE: It's fractions. On every test I get one-half to four-eighths wrong.

TCH: Speaking of trouble ... the principal had to handle a lot of the trouble. Part of my job was to try to head it off, before it got to the principal.

SUE: Miss _____, could I have permission ...

TCH: May I have permission ...

SUE: May I have permission to go see the principal?

TCH: What's the matter, Susie?

SUE: I want to file a complaint.

TCH: *(sigh)* About what?

SUE: The school bus. It's a zoo! I mean, like, today? I went to sit in my usual seat and Margaret White was in it. She



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