**HOWARD A. EILAR’S CHRISTMAS GIFT**

It was June 23, 1959, when I was interviewed by Mr. Guenther for a job teaching junior high school in Arcadia at Jackson Central Junior High in Hamilton County, Indiana, about 30 miles almost due north of Indianapolis. I had answered a job announcement posted in the Administrative Building at Ball state Teacher’s College, where I had just graduated earlier the same month. I received a letter from Mr. Gunther, who was the principal at Jackson Central High School. I sent him my college transcripts with the application letter. We had spoken only briefly at my interview when he asked me, “Would you accept the position for $3,800 for nine months?”

It was a slightly lower figure than I had expected, but he unexpectedly put me on the spot. I said, “Yes,” which would provide me with the opportunity to work with Howard A. Eilar, who would be hired a few days later by Mr. Guenther to be principal of Jackson Central Junior High and my boss. What a man!

One reason I had accepted the job with, hopefully, no outward hesitation was that the day before I had received my own application letter back from a school system in Cincinnati with the letter “e” circled in red in the word “Saterday.” No other comment. I did my own typing on an Olivetti manual. And I was applying to teach English!

We were to report to school two days before classes began on September 7, 1959. I met the six junior high school teachers and of course Mr. Eilar. At age 21, I was by far the youngest teacher, having graduated from Ball State Teacher’s College in three years.

Mr. Eilar gave each of us teachers a very large black loose-leaf three-ring notebook with some papers inside. It turns out these were all memos with a long list of rules we must follow. He went over each of these rules with us one by one. It was apparent that Mr. Eilar was a serious man with a stiff and aloof personality. He did not even once chuckle or relax his outrageously formal manner. The first rule was that during the year we each had to keep all of the memos from him in the big black binder in chronological order. He was free, he said, to enter our classrooms at any time to check on the updatedness of the memo binder.

I had never seen so many rules or such precise ones. For example in gym class the students must remove their shoes before stepping onto the gym floor and they must line them up with the shoe toes just barely not touching the black line marking the limits of the gym basketball court. Girls could not wear their dresses or skirts with their knees showing, and girls in violation must be sent to Mr. Eilar’s office for him to inspect and if necessary to measure the extent of the alleged infraction of his rule. I didn’t ask him how we should determine where the knees began. After lunch in the cafeteria, the students must march single-file back to their homerooms, first the girls and then the boys and in sequence by their height, from shortest to tallest. The teacher must follow behind to insure complete compliance. Mr. Eilar announced he would normally be monitoring the march to the homerooms. The only other thing we were given was one ream of white paper (500 sheets) to be used for tests. A second ream was to be given in January.

Jackson central Junior High School consisted of approximately 200 students during the 1959-1960 school year. The students had been divided into class groups on the basis of their supposed intelligence and ability. I was assigned the 8-3s for homeroom, the smartest group of eighth graders, giving the inexperienced teacher the reputed best-behaved students in case I didn’t know how to conduct discipline. I was assigned to teach mainly the 7-1s, the least brainy of the seventh graders, all of whom has in fact failed the seventh grade the year before. I taught them English grammar, American literature, spelling, writing, and geography, in case I, the inexperienced teacher, could not keep up with the presumably smarter 8-3s or 7-4s.

The volume of “do not” memos from Mr. Eilar was unbelievable, two to four on a typical day. Our three-ring notebooks were getting fat. I remember calculating that at an average of three memos per day for six weeks (30 working days) at six teacher recipients (3 x 30 x 6 = 420) did indeed come to 420 pieces of paper or 84 percent of a ream of paper, which had to last each of us teachers until Christmas recess. Since Mr. Eilar’s memos had to be inserted into our three-ring notebooks, the memos all used a full page, even if the message was a single sentence.

There were so many rules, mostly senseless, that I not only intentionally started ignoring them; I neglected to insert them into my notebook. I even sent out a few surreptitious memos myself, ostensibly from Mr. Howard A. Eilar, but signed Mr. Howard F. Viler. I made my pseudo rules even more egregious than Mr. Eilar’s, which gave me a challenge. One of my Viler rules was that the teachers had to turn in a list of all books and magazines they had at home in order that Mr. Viler approve or disapprove of our reading selections. The memo went on to demand that we burn any copies of the *Communist Manifesto* or *Catcher in the Rye* and of course *Playboy* for the men teachers. The citation listing of our reading had to follow a precise reference format. I had one memo requiring male teachers to take turns watching boy students wash their hands before lunch and female teachers watching girl students performing the same cleansing. These were precise minute schedule changes mandated for teachers to rotate on and off duty, such as 11:47 a.m., etc. The first day after that memo, I observed Mr. Nandine glancing at his watch as he walked into the boy’s restroom on schedule. Mr. Eilar had to be pretty sure I was the memo author, though he never directly accused me.

But I had some run-ins with his hegemony. Once he correctly accused me of allowing my 8-3s to go outside the building after lunch, which was against his rule. We just all walked around the small school-ground yard, hardly a campus. There were of course no swings or play equipment. Mr. Eilar said later in the day, “I understand your class was outside today at noon. You know that is a violation of memo 173, item A, which is a reminder of one of the top 25 rules I covered on the first day we all met, on September 7.”

I responded with a straight face, “I’m sorry, Mr. Eilar. It was a case of mass insubordination. They all followed me outside.”

Mr. Eilar did not get my sarcastic humor and replied, “Well, Mr. Wheeler, if you can’t control your class, I certainly can. We’ll have no more of that. We’ll have to lock the doors while school is in session.” I didn’t know if Arcadia, Indiana, had any fire codes. I said “O.K.”

Mr. Eilar got the flu after Thanksgiving and missed three days of school. Mr. Ramsey, a most corpulent man, whose homeroom was the 8-2s, was acting principal. He called all of us teachers together after school on Mr. Eilar’s third-day absence and invited Mr. Guenther. It was an hour-long gripe session about Mr. Eilar. Many, but not all, of our grievances were aired. All Mr. Guenther promised at the meeting’s end was another ram of paper for each of us (which he brought us individually a few days later) and the statement that he “would look into the matter.”

Well, we made it through until Christmas break. Mr. Eilar would not allow any Christmas parties. All of us teachers and I am sure all of the students were ready for the short break.

When we all returned on January 3, 1960, I found out that I had, without knowing it, received the best Christmas present I could have possibly received that Christmas: Mr. Howard A. Eilar had resigned as principal of Jackson central Junior High.

Then the story came out, which explained so much. Mr. Eilar had walked away from the State Mental hospital in Richmond, Indiana, the previous March. Although a graduate of Ball state Teacher’s College in 1948, his real name was Howard A. Williams. He partially forged his name on his own college transcripts, invented portions of his resume and suppressed others. Apparently, Mr. Guenther had hired him as casually as he hired me that afternoon on June 23. Mr. Guenther explained to us on January 3 that he finally began checking on Mr. Eilar’s, née Williams’ credentials and quickly exposed the fraud. Mr. Eilar immediately volunteered to resign and was in fact placed back in the State Mental Hospital. Mr. Ramsey became our principal. Mr. Eilar’s was a Christmas present I treasured all the rest of my first year of teaching in Arcadia, Indiana, at Jackson Central Junior High School.

Merry Christmas!