

The Importance of People

Stephen M. Corey

KNOWING EACH OTHER

IT IS NOVEMBER and the State Teachers Association is meeting in Milwaukee. Miss Edith Thom and Miss Margaret Wale taught together for three years in Bowling Center where they were close friends and roommates. Last August Miss Wale accepted a position in Adison. The two have not seen one another for almost six months. After the first few minutes of bubbling at the excitement of being together again, they begin talking about their work. They are sitting on the mezzanine floor of the Hotel Schroeder from where they can watch the crowd milling about the lobby.

MISS THOM: I certainly miss you, Marge, but I'm glad you like Adison.

MISS WALE: Like it—I love it! And as soon as there's an opening in math I'll let you know. I've already told Mr. Walton about the way you get kids to use math. He made a memo—they say he always does about teachers. He's the only principal I've ever known who is really interested in new teachers even when he doesn't need any!

MISS THOM: He must have been the one who arranged for you to see those other folks when you applied.

MISS WALE: Yes. He has a theory that teachers work better if they know one another as people and he does a lot of things to help. You have no idea what a difference it makes.

MISS THOM: Don't I? Marge, do you know that I haven't had a good talk with any teacher at the high school since you left. When things started this fall everyone dashed around as usual and said, "Oh, hello. How are you?" without really giving a damn, and you got the feeling no one cared—so you didn't either, just to get even. And so it goes. If it weren't for the kids I'd get a job in a foundry!

MISS WALE: I know. I lived through it for three years, didn't I—or rather didn't *we*? Somehow though I had a hunch things would be different at Adison; that's why I wasn't so interested in a lot more money. When I first saw Mr. Walton he treated me like an equal—not patronizingly, but as if I *was* important—note the mood!

MISS THOM: I get it. What did he do?

MISS WALE: Oh, ever so many little things! He wasn't domineering or all "ex officio." He sat at a table with me rather than behind his desk and seemed

- honestly interested in me. He asked what *I* had done and what *I* wanted to do and then told me something about the school.
- MISS THOM: Did he talk big like Old Stuffed Shirt always does and describe what wasn't as if it was?
- MISS WALE: No. He didn't talk about himself or run down his predecessor or act like God. He just told what some of the teachers were doing and asked me what I thought of it.
- MISS THOM: How long did this go on?
- MISS WALE: Oh, about an hour. I blabbed away and told him about the club you and I had and how the juniors in Social Science wanted to study delinquency in Bowling Center and we had to bootleg it under the topic Current American History because the Stuffed Shirt said no. Only, of course, I didn't say Stuffed Shirt. I almost talked my head off.
- MISS THOM: But what about meeting the teachers?
- MISS WALE: That bowled me over! There are four other Social Science teachers in the school and Mr. Walton had arranged for each of them who was in town to see me. He didn't send me all over town looking for them either. He had made a little schedule telling me who I would see at 1:30 and who at 2 and so on. Each person's name was given and a word or two about him and his interests. They all came one at a time to Mr. Walton's outer office and he introduced me—broke the ice a bit, and then left.
- MISS THOM: How were the teachers?
- MISS WALE: Fine. They certainly plumbed me though, in a kindly, interested way. Wanted to find out my ideas about kids and methods. I learned a lot about them, too, because we were pretty relaxed and talked easily after a few minutes.
- MISS THOM: They must have liked you.
- MISS WALE: Yes, I guess so. I got a letter at home from Mr. Walton in a week or so and he said that everyone who had seen me wanted him to ask that I come to Adison. It certainly made me feel good. I called him up right away and said I'd come. Then I went to work on what I'd have to do. I never *was* so pepped up.
- MISS THOM: Have you come to know many of the other teachers yet?
- MISS WALE: Sure. Mrs. Hand, the wife of the head of the department, looked around for a room for me and wrote recommending one about the middle of August. I'd not even asked her to! The whole staff worked for a couple of days before the kids came, getting things planned so that everything would start off well. We had a number of committee and large group meetings. At the very beginning Mr. Hand took me around and introduced me to all of the teachers. He acted like an old friend, you know—told them something about me and so on.
- MISS THOM: Gosh! Remember how we felt when things started three years ago? Scared stiff and not even knowing who taught in the next room. No one seemed to care either. I'll never forget that first month.

MISS WALE: Neither will I. But listen to this! All four Social Science teachers came to my room the Thursday evening after school started and each brought something to eat, including a bottle of good sherry. We had a wonderful time. I felt as though I'd known the group for years.

MISS THOM: Do the teachers have any fun? Do they get together much?

MISS WALE: Yes, but no one seems to run around panting and "arranging" things. Every Wednesday night, though, from say 7 to 10 the parents and kids and teachers—or whoever wants to—come to the industrial arts shop in the basement and work on hobbies. I've been there three or four times already. Met an awfully nice couple, Mr. and Mrs. Brannard, who—

MISS THOM: Knew all about working with plastics?

MISS WALE: Yes, smarty. We learned how to twist strands that were heated to about a hundred and fifty degrees. By the way, how do you like this bracelet?

MISS THOM: Wonderful.

MISS WALE: *And* Mr. Brannard has a brother who is in Madison finishing his internship—

MISS THOM: I thought there was something like that—telling me how much you like the school when all the time it's that young M.D.!

MISS WALE: Now, Edith, it *is* the school and the teachers and the kids *and* the M.D. and *everything*. I feel I can call my soul my own. The teachers seem to like me and are interested in what I do. So I'm interested in them, too. We all work together.

MISS THOM: I don't know. I'm suspicious when everything is all sweetness and light and everyone loves everyone else. Sounds sticky to me—and impossible!

MISS WALE: It's nothing of the kind! We argue and jump on one another's ideas plenty, but hardly ever on one another. Like the arguments you and I used to have. Remember teacher-pupil planning? I was all starry-eyed after the workshop and you broke my bubbles right and left. I was hurt a little but I knew you liked most of me anyway; so it wasn't so hard when you made me change some of my notions.

MISS THOM: Yes, I remember. I said the same things, like a fool, to Marian this September when she came back from Northwestern all full of ideas about turning everything over to the kids on the first day. She hasn't spoken to me since. We never were very close and now we won't ever be.

MISS WALE: I certainly know more about the teachers in Adison now than I did in Bowling Center after three years. We talk to one another and go out of our way to be thoughtful. It sounds sort of silly but I'd really jump at the chance to take a study hall or do something like that for another teacher. They'd do it for me, too. I guess we'd come out even in the long run, but we feel better when we want to.

MISS THOM: How are the kids?

MISS WALE: Oh, these kids speak when they see you on the street and don't seem scared or sullen. A lot of them hang around after class and joke and *tease*.

They're sort of self-respecting and cocky—like they ought to be. I love 'em all, or most of them anyway.

MISS THOM: Well, all I can say is more power to you. Back at old Bowling Center we still come at 7:45 and dash in to the office to sign up, hoping we won't be yapped at. Then we try not to run over anyone or break any legs getting out of the building at 3:30. Everyone goes his own way. Nobody really knows anyone else. I don't have a real friend any more. Smith is still fighting with Mrs. Bye about who should teach the units on "The Novel." When spring comes everyone is afraid he'll not get a contract for next year, half afraid and half hoping. I haven't had a compliment on my work yet this year except from some of the kids—bless 'em. They're victims of the same mess, though, too. And those staff meetings—every one's a brawl. Thank heavens, they only come twice each semester!

MISS WALE: You'd certainly love the Adison bunch. They all feel as if they "belonged" and the big thing is they know and like one another. I'm not sure whom I wish would break his neck in the math department so Mr. Walton could send for you, but I'll keep working. Maybe I could push someone downstairs like in *Friday, Thank God*. Did you read it?

MISS THOM: Yes, after a fashion, but too much happened in a week for my weak heart. But honestly, Marge, I hope you can get one of the math teachers to accept a better job. I'll think of it a lot, really. Right now, though, something tells me I'm hungry. Let's go to Mader's now so we can get back to hear Prescott at the Auditorium.

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Toward a New Curriculum

THE DEPARTMENT'S YEARBOOK for 1944, which will deal with extending educational opportunity for children, youth, and adults, has been given the title *Toward a New Curriculum*. The book is being edited by Gordon N. Mackenzie and J. Cecil Parker and will be released early in 1944. Each member of the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development will receive a copy without charge as a part of his membership privilege. Sale price, \$2 per copy.

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