

Ask the Educator

The problem teacher



JOSEPH HADDAD

QUESTION: We have a person teaching at our local elementary school who is a very poor teacher. She really turns kids off to learning. She is mean and abusive to many students.

All the parents I know consider her incompetent and have lodged complaints with the principal. She is middle-aged and has taught in almost every elementary school in our district.

Word has it that they simply move her to another building when the complaints begin to mount up.

I spoke to our principal about this situation. He is a very fine man whose hands are tied by the teacher tenure law and the teachers' union. Isn't there anything we parents can do to protect our children from a wasted year?

Mrs. H. H.

ANSWER: The tenure law is not the problem.

Gathering proof of an educator's incompetence is tedious, time consuming, thankless work. One does not make friends documenting the poor work produced by a colleague. Such documentation must be done according to rules of due process.

Information must be collected without deceit or trickery and with the full knowledge of the person in question.

The individual may not cooperate in this process. Further, she may take the case to the school lounge in an effort to build support or pressure the administrator. Likewise, she may seek the defense of sympathetic parents or a school board member.

No, your principal's hands are not tied, but he may feel overwhelmed by a task which is difficult and which may result in damage to his reputation or in lowered morale among his staff. It is not unusual for the administrator who deals with controversy to be seen by his own superiors as a source of trouble.

Bureaucrats would sometimes prefer to keep trouble under wraps than to deal with it. Open conflict implies that the leadership is not in control and that is an image not to be desired.

DESPITE MY observations, don't be discouraged.

Incompetence certainly can be documented. It happens quietly every year in most school districts. It is difficult, and the union does fight hard for teacher rights, but that's only fair isn't it?

You should insist on action from your principal. Go up the chain of command if you must, one step at a time. The district director of instruction or assistant superintendent is generally next in line.

Be fair and decent in your approach. Stay away from unsubstantiated rumor or unprovable allegations.

Have dates, events, facts and what you did about it written out. Keep copies of all communications and take notes. One or two complaints will not be enough. You will need proof of several acts of incompetence over a period of time.

Finally, don't be disillusioned if your activity results in retraining or in-service for the teacher instead of dismissal.

You know we must always walk the line and find a balance between compassion and fair play for the teacher and concern for the educational welfare of the students.

Common decency dictates that we pay attention to both sides of this issue. No one starts out planning to be mediocre at his work.

(The writer is director of special education for a suburban school district. Questions of general interest may be addressed to: Joseph Haddad, Observer and Eccentric Newspapers, 1225 Bowers, Birmingham, MI 48012.

WSU will reap street parking fines

Wayne State University took a step toward collecting its own fines for parking violations on university property when it recently established a parking violations bureau.

Parking tickets now written by WSU Public Safety Officers are forwarded to Detroit Traffic Court. Fines range from \$5 to \$25, depending on the violation. WSU officers, who are commissioned by the City of Detroit, write 20,000 tickets annually.

After the university parking violations bureau begins operation next spring, it would receive, process and administer funds received from fines paid voluntarily within a specified period—probably 15 or 30 days after the offense.

Those funds would be used for maintenance and improvement of the university's parking system.

Tickets not paid within the specified period would be forwarded to traffic court. Revenue from those cases still would go to Detroit.

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Shovel snow to right of driveway

John L. Grubba, Oakland County Road Commission managing director, offers the following tip for reducing your winter woes:

"The snow you remove from your driveway should be piled to the right of your driveway entrance as you face the street.

"Then as the roadway plows come along in the direction of traffic movement, they will carry your snow away from your driveway."

Grubba said the procedure will reduce, but not eliminate, snow to the road edge. "It is not feasible to lift the plow blade for every driveway," he said.

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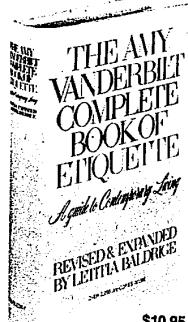
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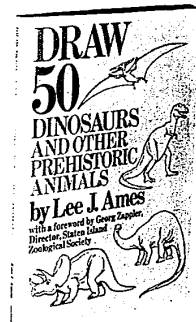
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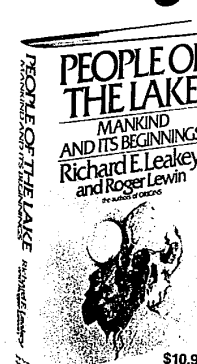
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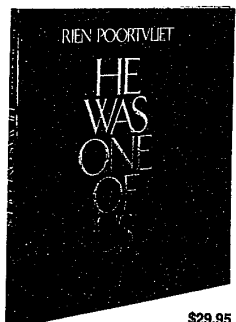
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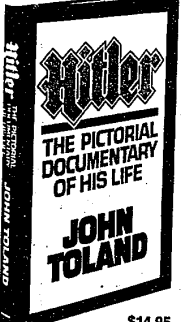
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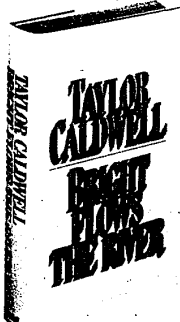
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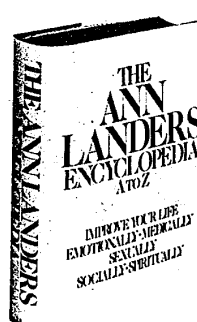
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