

Canadian Harambee Education Society

We can't do everything . . . but we can do something

Spring 2023 Newsletter #79



Return of Students to Mukumu

Sacred Heart Girls School Mukumu encountered a very serious problem at the end of March and all the students there were immediately sent home until further notice and the school was put under quarantine. The government sent in a special team to investigate as several hundred students were hospitalized with food poisoning and four individuals subsequently died. Although 8 of the CHES students were affected, all have since recovered.

For your information: the government has done extensive tests of the water at Mukumu and determined that there was severe contamination with the current source. They have closed off that source, have been digging a new bore hole some distance away, and will ensure that there is no contamination in that new water area. Water treatment facilities are being added as well. All foods that they had stored at the school have been destroyed and they even have torn down the structures that they food was stored in and are building new facilities. Refurbishment of the kitchen has been done along with replacement of the dining tables with aluminum material and the dormitory doors have been replaced to open outwards. Preparation is being made to replace all the asbestos roofing in 6 buildings at the school with modern iron sheets.

Both the Kenyan and Canadian boards were very concerned with the Mukumu closure and that the school would not re-open in a timely manner putting the girls' education at risk: emergency meetings were held. CHES girls were called to the CHES compound in Kakamega to confirm their health status. A workshop was held at the same time to offer emotional support to the girls and their families.

After direction from the Canadian board to arrange educational sessions, daily tutorials started April 17 and covered Math, Biology, and Chemistry for all Form levels at the CHES compound for the duration of the indefinite closure. At the request of the Form 4 student, Physics was added.

Six teachers, three of whom were CHES grads, were hired to teach these sessions which went from 9:15 – 2:15 daily. Melvine, a CHES grad currently attending the University in Kakamega and one of the tutors, wrote to the Canadian agent who had just left Kenya as all this was occurring: "all the girls were really appreciative and eager

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to learn and so happy to have the tutorials. Everyone is really appreciative of CHES Canada for the support making this happen.”



Parents (and CHES board members) were invited to the school on April 29 for a meeting by the Education Ministry and were allowed to inspect the school infrastructure that was improved and assess for themselves the safety measures that are being put into place.

After over a month of being closed, Mukumu reopened with a staggered entry for its students starting with Form 4 on May 2. All students were back in class by May 8. However, before they were able to return they needed to undergo mandatory medical testing. As there was a cost involved for the medical test which parents had to pay and the parents of CHES girls are subsistent farmers with little or no income, CHES covered all the medical tests required.

Although the tutorial costs (teachers, food, school supplies, transportation)

and the medical tests were not in our regular budget, we used the monies we had in our Student Support fund and hope that sponsors will be generous and send in extra donations to help cover these unanticipated expenses.

by Joy Ruffeski

A Big Surprise – What Can I Say. He’s Done it Again!

We know that last year was supposed to be “the last sale” for Tomatoes for Tanzania, but

You can’t keep a good man down and Willie Axelson, now 87 years of age, has two greenhouses full of tomato plants as well as basil and green peppers. Willi has been busy transplanting tomatoes (cherry, plum, medium, beefsteak, heritage), basil ((lemon, Genovese, Thai), and peppers. They look great and are just \$5 each.

The sale will be held on Saturday, May 27th beginning at 10 am at the home of Sara Williams. For more information, please email sara.william@usask.ca

Those of you in Saskatchewan, please make the date and spread the word to your friends, neighbours, family, and colleagues.

All monies will go to the Canadian Harambee Education Society’s hostel in Katesh, Tanzania - the home of about 100 impoverished girls who are supported through secondary school through this registered Canadian charity.

by Sara Williams



Changing Magreth's Life

Although there were nearly 60 other children in her classes as she progressed through elementary school, Magreth was a bright student who hoped that her father, a subsistence farmer in rural Tanzania, would be able to find the funds to allow her to go to secondary school. These hopes were dashed when her dad, walking home from his fields, was hit and killed by a passing truck when Magreth was in Grade 6.



The family struggled on. Magreth with her siblings helped her mother in the fields after school. They could survive--just. But when Magreth did well in her government-set exams at the end of grade 7 and was offered a place in the nearest secondary school, there was no way the family could afford the cost involved: fees, uniform, texts, writing materials. No way.

Magreth then learned that there was place called CHES House in the nearby town of Katesh where she could apply for a scholarship to cover her secondary education. Magreth applied and was accepted. Although she had to walk an hour each way to school every day, she did so well through her four years at secondary school that CHES sponsored her to continue through two more years of high school. This provided her with university entrance. Magreth anticipates graduating with a degree in biochemistry in November 2023. She looks forward to a career in medical research. Her sponsors, who live on Salt Spring Island in British Columbia, are justifiably delighted with her success.

by Chris Harker

Report from a First-Time Agent

Barbara Melara sent this report on March 24, 2023.

It is hard to believe that I am down to my last two weeks here at CHES House in Kakamega. When I arrived in January it seemed like lots of time and now it seems to have flown by! I arrived on a Friday evening, having been met by Charles, a taxi driver who is familiar with CHES and is dependable. I had prearranged my pickup directly with Charles prior to my coming although I think Rebecca would organize it as well. On the way to CHES he made stops at the bank, at Safaricom for phone and at Quickmart for food. While it was after six when I arrived at CHES there were several people waiting to welcome me, including Rebecca and Gladys. Gladys ensured I was settled in before she went home. Larry and Linda Huber were finishing up their stint when I arrived, although I didn't meet them until Saturday evening. It was helpful to be oriented by them.

I found the little house to be comfortable and well equipped although after the Hubers left I moved into the apartment in the office building. I find it a little more comfortable but mainly enjoy the space and convenience and being at the front of the property. We have recently had solar security lighting installed and it is most effective at lighting up the compound. Today was a dismal and dark day so the lights are not as bright as usual. I am told that the area where the house is has built up considerably since CHES first moved here. Certainly in the time I have been here the road has been greatly improved.

It is an easy walk into town with many vendors selling fruits and vegetables. I haven't bought any prepared food from them but do often buy fruits and vegetables and am vigilant about washing them. I have not been sick while being here but I am careful about what I eat. While there are two large grocery stores with practically everything, I mainly shop at one of the smaller grocery stores and find I am able to eat well and satisfactorily. I am glad I have a Kindle with me as the lighting at night is not always bright enough to comfortably read a printed book. I have also done some craft work which has helped pass the time when I am here in the compound in the evening.





I arrived at the end of the selection process although was able to see how it was done and was here for several of the verifier's reports. I did participate in the final stage--choosing the girls who were offered a scholarship. Well over 500 girls came to the gate, over 200 were interviewed, and 50 received scholarships, 49 from CHES Canada and 1 from a group of CHES alumni. During my stay I have visited all of the schools as we paid fees and also took the opportunity to meet the girls. Many of the 2022 graduates came into the office and I was able to meet the girl I have sponsored, which was a special delight--meeting any of the girls was great. It was fun looking at their first-form picture and seeing them now. Many of the graduates are not recognizable

as the same girl. All of them speak of their gratitude and their thanks for being given the gift of their education and all have dreams that includes a profession and helping others, starting with their families!

I am not sure of the formula but certainly every scholarship impacts and transforms the lives of many. I have met several people who have told me that CHES transformed their lives. One afternoon I received a call from the chairman of the Chamber of Commerce. My name and CHES had been mentioned and he stopped the meeting and said, "CHES made me the man I am." He was a beneficiary back in the 1990s.

I was part of a most successful Patrons' meeting one Saturday. The Patrons are committed to the wellbeing of the CHES girls in their schools and are the first people to recognize a problem and to offer a listening ear, a counselling session--whatever the girls need. They noted that the girls coming have increasingly complex lives and difficulties, and each one of the girls gets paid attention to. At the schools with smaller numbers of girls I was often able to get into conversation with them. I always asked about their sponsors and saw the happiness of those who write and receive letters back and the sadness in the ones who do not get letters from their sponsors.



I was here for the Graduate Celebration, also held on a Saturday. The compound was decorated, a tent was set up and chairs lined up. Board members arrived and the graduates and alumni did too. Gladys and her crew (last-born son and niece) were in the back cooking a delicious lunch. Gladys had brought 10-12 chickens the night before (who spent their last night on the grass). The girls were excited and they all looked so grown up and beautiful. The speeches were encouraging. Music accompanied the girls as they received their certificates and a pen with the CHES logo and the words "Proud Girl." They will be treasured.



I have gone on a few day trips, outings since being here--to the Impala Sanctuary and Dungo Beach in Kisumu, to the PAO Park in El Dorset, and to Matunda Soy. I have one more planned. I went on a great safari to Masai Mara starting from Nairobi. I attended a fund-raiser service project at the Home for Fatherless Children and have enjoyed walking around town. When I need transportation I use tuk-tuks primarily, although I once used a motorcycle and several times have experienced a matatu (bus).

The staff here have all been welcoming and friendly and all are committed to the girls--it's more than an ordinary job. While I have no doubt I have gained far more than I have given I have had a most wonderful three months at CHES and do hope I have added something.

by Barbara Melara



I'm Going to Sit Right Down and

Many of you reading this newsletter have a girl in Kenya or Tanzania that you're sponsoring. For many of you, she's not your first girl. You have every right to feel pleased and proud of yourself as you are responsible for dramatically altering the life of each young woman you support—and altering it very positively.

But how many of you write to your girl? Regrettably, many sponsors don't. However, as I've had the privilege of being in Katesh and watching a number of girls receive and read a letter from their sponsor, I can assure you it is a moving, meaningful and heart-warming moment. The excitement, the sharing, the puzzlement ("What is hockey? What is a bear? What is a skateboard?") are wonderful to witness. That letter communicates to each girl that "my sponsor is a real person (or group) who, despite never having met me, obviously cares for me enough to write."

Most sponsors who write describe their family, their hobbies, and their activities. Food and pets are also popular. If sponsors have kids or grandkids the same age as their girl, get them to write too. Often a photograph or two is included. That's a great idea. But if you're thinking of writing, please don't include any small gifts or paper money as this heightens the risk of it failing to arrive.

Writing or typing letters for many of us is becoming a forgotten practice. For most CHES girls, letter writing is something they have never done until being instructed in Form I to "write to your sponsor." That explains why many of you receive letters that may appear formal and structured. They are being told how to write a letter and what they may want to put in it. In many cases the formula is followed without a great deal of personal input and creativity. We also have to realize that these girls are writing in their third language. How many of us are adept enough to write in even a second?

Many of the girls do not realize that it is customary to respond to points made in letters they receive. We are trying to change this but it will take some time.

The letters you receive twice a year are mailed from the CHES office. Don't expect a spontaneous reply to a letter you send as purchasing a stamp would be unaffordable for virtually every girl. If you have received a letter from your girl, a return address to their school is probably included. If you're uncertain, write to her care of the CHES office at the address below. It'll get to your girl eventually, though possibly not until the next time they are all gathered together, which happens twice a year, in January and July.

So if you'd like to make the lovely young lady that you sponsor a whole lot happier, please wander over to your computer and spend a few minutes telling her a bit about you and your family. Your letter will be treasured.

CHES office addresses for mailing letters:

CHES House
PO Box 2036-50100
Kakamega – Mumias RD (Joyland)
Kenya

CHES Hanang
Box 69
Katesh – Hanang District
Manyara Region
Tanzania 27301

by Chris Harker

Stacy Anyona's Story

I was hopeless about my admission to high school, but then CHES came in just when I needed it, I was able to be admitted to my school of choice, Mukumu Girls, and the school has moulded me to become a lady of substance. Now I am glad I have completed my high school peacefully without strain in school fees all thanks to CHES. I think I am well equipped with values drawn from the motivational speakers brought by Madam Rebecca and those at school. I look forward to get an admission at the University to pursue my dream of studying Medicine. Thanks again CHES.



Metrin's Story

My name is Metrin Sophia Asiko. I am an accountant by profession. Wow, it feels great to be able to introduce myself that way! This is all possible courtesy of CHES in Kenya. My life took a different turn at the end of 2007 when I was accepted at CHES as a replacement student at a time when I had given up on my education and was soon to give up on my life.

Almost two years before joining CHES my mother had died of tuberculosis and my dad was not present in our lives. The community had raised some money for me to join secondary school but they could not do it anymore so I was almost dropping out when one of my teachers, Mr. Evans Mudegu, told me about CHES and invited me to go for an interview. At the beginning of 2008 my life changed for the better when I joined Sacred Heart Mukumu Girls High School through CHES.

While with CHES I was able to access good education. CHES also saved my life since it was then that I was taken to a hospital and diagnosed with tuberculosis. The disease was treated even though it took longer to treat because it had advanced, given that I was infected while still at home and could not go to a hospital. Had CHES not taken me up I would have died from a disease that was treatable, just like my mother and later my younger sister who died from it. So it is not dramatic to say that were it not for CHES to rescue me, someone else would be telling my story and referring to me as the "late Metrin."



I speak on behalf of most if not all CHES girls when I say that we can never thank CHES enough for coming to our rescue and transforming our lives. I lived at CHES House throughout my high school and university (during holidays and summer), and when I think of home the first place I think of is CHES. I am grateful for all the CHES agents who come to volunteer at CHES Kenya. They leave their country and come to Kenya, a country that is many miles away from theirs, and they have no idea about the culture and way of life. In fact some come back after visiting the first time. Some of the CHES agents even became my second parents. Norman and Cheryl Filipino gave me a home, watched me grow from a high school kid, took me to university and made it possible for me to have a career. They literally brought me up. In my adult life I met Larry and Linda Huber who were very kind and loving and took me like their own daughter. Their love and care is unending.

It will be such a shame if I do not mention the pillars of the CHES girls in Kenya, Rebecca. Most girls would not even make it through high school if not for the care, love and guidance we receive from her. I certainly wouldn't have. To her being at CHES is not just a job for her. The passion she has to see every girl succeed is just amazing. I have been able to volunteer at CHES a few times, and I've seen girls go through high school and the transformation from when they joined until they graduated reminds me of myself and it brings pure joy.

CHES gave me a home, a family and even some of my best friends, who are my fellow CHES alumni and have become more like a family to me. Long live CHES!

by Metrin Asiko

The CHES Website is Updated Regularly

Have you checked out our website www.canadianharambee.ca lately? On the website home page (at the bottom) we regularly post photos and short captions of the most recent CHES happenings as information is sent from our office managers and agents.



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The Tanzanian School Year

We often have Tanzanian sponsors who are a bit confused when their students' marks and school transition plans are sent to them. The reason for this is that the school configurations and term dates are quite different from ours in Canada.

Students there attend primary School from Standard 1 to Standard 7 (our Grades 1-7). If they do well enough on national government standardized exams at the end of Standard 7, they proceed to secondary school, which is Forms 1-4 (our Grades 8-11.) At the end of Form 4, students again write national exams, and those who do very well are given places in high school, which consists of Forms 5 and 6 (our Grade 12 and the old Grade 13).

If a student's marks are high enough, Form 4 graduates can either continue to Forms 5 and 6 or apply to attend junior colleges. Successful Form 6 graduates can attend university or other colleges of their choice.

The Tanzanian government provides loans to higher education students qualifying for entry to colleges or university if they have been supported through school by a registered NGO like CHES.

The school year in Tanzania is also different from ours. The primary and secondary school year is from January to the end of November, whereas the school year for high school students is from July to the following June.

by Catriona Harker

Kenya - Curriculum System

The Kenya curriculum system is currently undergoing a reformation. The outgoing education system is referred to as 8-4-4. This is designed to provide eight years in primary (elementary) school, Class 1-8 (Grade 1-8); four years in secondary (high) school, Form 1-4 (Grade 9-12); and four years of higher education, university, or college.

After completing eight years in primary school, the students sit for the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) exam. This exam is conducted every year in October/November. Students who qualify are promoted to secondary schools; this is when CHES comes in. Primary school education is free to all students and parents/guardians are expected to pay for secondary school education. Girls who score higher marks in KCPE and have no means to continue with secondary school education get the opportunity to apply for a CHES scholarship.

At the end of Form 4 (Grade 12), students sit for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) exam. Those who qualify proceed to university or college and have the option to apply for student loans from the government. The 8-4-4 system has been around for more than 30 years, the same time that CHES has been sponsoring girls through secondary school in Kenya.

The Government of Kenya through the Ministry of Education is currently rolling out the new curriculum system, Competency Based Curriculum (CBC). Under this system the students proceed to different levels of education for a period of 2-6-3-3-3. This includes the following:

- 2 years in pre-primary education.
- 6 years in primary education (Grade 1- 6). Students will be assessed nationally at Grade 6 with an exam called Kenya Primary School Assessment (KPSEA).
- 3 years in junior secondary education (Grade 7-9). At the end Grade 9, students will sit for a national exam known as Kenya Junior Secondary Education Assessment (KJSEA).
- 3 years in senior secondary education (Grade 10-12). Students will be assessed with a national exam called the Kenya Senior Secondary Education Assessment at the end of Grade 12.
- 3 years in university or college.

CBC system has not been fully implemented in Kenyan schools. CHES will continue to follow the Kenya education standards with its sole mission to sponsor as many girls as it can.

by Lorrie Sarah Okunyanyi



Erick's Story

Barbara Melara, who was a CHES agent from January to April 2023, spoke to Erick, an askari (watchman) at CHES House in Kenya in March. She wrote:

I was sitting outside having tea with Erik (as has become our weekend habit) and he said he would like to make a testament about how CHES has been for him. I asked him if I could send it to CHES Canada and he said I could. So I got out a pen and paper and wrote down his story. It is good to see how widespread CHES's influence is and how it impacts more than the girls and their families. Erik is educating his own children—and it is unlikely he would have made that the priority it is for him without his CHES experience and support.

Here is Erick's story as transcribed by Barbara.

When coming to CHES I first came to slash the grass. There was a mzungu, Ron, who spoke with Rebecca and Joel and told them, "We need an askari for the weekend and this guy is working very well." [Note: Mzungu refers to foreigners, and here is used to describe a visiting CHES agent.]

I said to Rebecca, "I don't know English language," and Ron said that is no problem. I said, "How, if I need something or have a problem, how can I tell them?" So, Rebecca speaks with Ron, and Ron says that when mzungus come they will link with Erik and teach him or will connect him with an African teacher to teach him English language.



A mzungu, Lynn, came and we sat at table and I started to learn. When I was not learning well they got an African teacher who taught me English and Swahili and slowly I learned. From then to now, if you talk English I am hearing well but to speak it is still hard. CHES has helped me learn English.

When I came I was zero to everything English. I didn't know any words. I talked with my hands; if I needed a match I demonstrated striking a match. From then to now I am learning slowly by slowly. When a mzungu is here I am very happy to speak English. I am very happy to see agents come. My children are learning English at school and now I can talk with my first born in English. It is important to learn English--it is better to know English. Many mzungu

people come here as agents and if they inquire I can help them. I can tell them about the tuk-tuk and the motorbike. I can tell them the tuk-tuk is better than bike. [Note: The tuk-tuk is a three-wheeled motorized rickshaw that carries passengers.]

When my children are big they can live anywhere--Nairobi, Mombasa--and it will be better for them with English. It is better my sons learn English and Swahili so they will know how to live other places, how to know Eldoret and Kisumu and other places.

Thank you so much Canadian people to employ someone who does not speak English. Thank you so much. Even now when I walk somewhere or go somewhere and people are speaking English I know well what they say.

by Erick Mandu

Katesh: Who Goes There?

For about 16 years after we retired in 2000, Catriona and I ran a safari company we called Chriscat Safaris. Two or three times a year we escorted groups to visit many of Tanzania's iconic game parks. We also organized numerous trips for those who wished to travel on their own. It was a wonderful second career.

After some of these safaris and after most of the group were on their way home, we would take the opportunity to visit the CHES operation in Katesh. Often we would be accompanied by a few of our safariers who wanted to visit their girl or who, having previously known nothing of CHES, wanted to learn what it was all about. Such visits generally led to new sponsors and were emotional and touching. No one can witness the meeting of a sponsor and their girl without experiencing tears and a very lumpy throat.



We can't do everything . . . but we can do something!

Since 2016, when we aged-out of escorting safaris, there have been few such visits to CHES House. To the best of our knowledge, besides ourselves, only Joy Ruffeski, Robb and Jeanette Taylor, and Sara Williams have been there.

Safaris are expensive, COVID has been a nuisance, and the organization to get into Katesh is complicated for a novice visitor. However, CHES House remains in place and the CHES team there is always happy to see visitors. In addition, we now have a CHES grad, Adelina Gatling, who owns and runs a very successful safari company, which operates as Budget Safari Tanzania : www.budget-safari-tanzania.com. She offers a 15% discount to CHES sponsors. For more information, email Adelina at adelgatling@gmail.com.

Visiting Katesh is not akin to staying in a luxury hotel. But for a modest price you can stay in our very comfortable three-bedroom CHES House with three bathrooms, a kitchen and living room, all adjacent to the CHES office. It is also on the same grounds as the Sara Williams Hostel where approximately 100 girls reside during term time. Visitors would be responsible for their own meals and housekeeping but our CHES team can arrange for local people to very economically help with shopping, cooking, cleaning and local transport.

You will have a memorable and meaningful experience and hopefully get to meet your girl if she attends school locally. Visiting your CHES girl at school in another more distant area could also be arranged. You'll carry home memories that will probably supersede those of your safari.

If this interests you in any way, Catriona and I are able to provide any background information you might need relating to either organizing a safari or to visiting Katesh. Feel free to get in touch at chriscat@pacificcoast.net or call us at 250-656-9229.

by Catriona and Chris Harker

Returning Home from 3 Years Teaching in Tanzania- *The Principle of Parking*

It was late September 1972, during a morning break, the staffroom at capacity. Coffee was being poured, lunch bags opened, conversation in full spate. Mr. Tinker, the principal, opened the door, glanced around the room until he saw me, looked me right in the eye and then said, in a very loud voice, "I suppose that's the way they do it in Africa?"

There was immediate silence. Puzzled silence, as no one knew what he was talking about, though everyone assumed I did. I didn't, though it was obvious he was talking to me; no one else in the room had ever been near Africa. I had recently returned to Canada after a three-year stint of teaching in Tanzania.

"Er, the way they do what in Africa," I asked, hoping that the reply was not going to embarrass the ladies in the room. After all, at that point in time, we'd all grown up with an understanding that certain topics were not mentioned in the presence of the opposite sex.

"Parking facing out, instead of facing in like everyone else," he stated, staring at me in a most severe manner. He allowed the point to sink in for a moment and then turned on his heel and left.

The room was silent for another moment and then exhaled in conversation. "What's he talking about?" "Is he serious?" "Pass the sugar." And so on.

Things came into fuzzy focus for me. I was the driver of a carpool and came to school almost an hour before classes began. On arrival, I took the time, unlike others, to back into a parking stall. It was something I always did, everywhere; one of my idiosyncrasies. Granted, my car, a small-wheel-base, right-hand drive Land Rover I'd brought with me from Tanzania, was a little conspicuous. And I'd only been at the school a few weeks and had yet to re-adjust fully to the Canadian way of life.

Was there some rule of which I was unaware? After a few minutes of discussion, the consensus was that "Tinker was joking." No one could believe he'd be concerned about a tiny detail in how someone parked a car.

I had to collect some papers from the office before the end of break, so I left the staffroom a few minutes later and made my way down the hall. Mr. Tinker emerged from his office as I was checking my box.

"I hope you don't mind me having a go at you," he said.

"Of course not, Mr. Tinker," I replied with an ingratiating smile. "I can take a joke," I chuckled.

Tinker whirled about. "Oh, I wasn't joking. I was out in the parking lot a while ago and saw your car is parked facing out."



“Yes?” I queried.

“Everyone else is parked facing in.”

“Is that a problem?”

“Well, what am I going to say if a member of the School Board arrives at the school and wants to know whose car that is?”

“You could say it belongs to me,” I said. “I’m afraid I don’t see what the problem is.”

“Well, it looks as if you want to leave early,” stated Mr. Tinker.

“But I do leave early,” I replied. A member of my pool had to get home to babysit right after school so that his wife could go to work.

“That’s not the point,” said the principal. “I’d like to see you park facing in like everyone else.”

I was edging towards irritation but felt that a rational rather than an outburst would be best. “It’s an old car Mr. Tinker. I’ve had some problems with the starter. If I face it out, I can run down the hill and jump start it if there are problems.”

Tinker seized on this opening. “Look,” he said. “You park facing in like everyone else and if you ever have a problem, I will guarantee you fifty kids to push you out and down the hill.”

I had visions of running over half the soccer team. It was time to be forthright. “Mr. Tinker; that’s just the way I park. I’ve always done it that way. I’m not making any statement, but I don’t think it has anything to do with the way I teach or how I relate to kids.”

To my amazement, the principal, an ex-navy officer, snapped to attention. I wondered if he was going to salute. Instead, he said, “It’s against Board policy to park that way, against the building. It’s a District rule.”

It was true that the section of the parking lot where I generally parked was near a building, though concrete baffles prevented any vehicle from making contact. There were no windows in the vicinity, but it occurred to me that perhaps there might be some concerns about exhaust marks of fumes. However, the parking area was L shaped. The other leg of the lot was nowhere near any structure. “If that’s the problem Mr. Tinker, I’ll park in the other section.”

“You’re just making a lot of trouble for yourself,” he announced. “Park where you want but do what I’ve asked. Park facing in and not facing out.” And with that he turned, walked into his office, and shut the door.

The school secretary had witnessed this interchange and was now sitting at her desk, dumbfounded.

“Is that true? That there’s a parking rule?” I asked.

“I’ll call the District office and try to find out for you,” she answered.

At that point, the bell rang and I returned to class. During the lunch hour, I had reported my dialogue with Mr. Tinker, and the parking edict was discussed at some length. Reactions varied from solemn acknowledgement to derisive snorts. No one had heard of any rule, but no one was sure there wasn’t one.

Midway through the first afternoon class, the school secretary appeared outside my door. I sidled over. “There’s no rule anywhere about parking,” she reported. “They thought I was nuts to ask.”

Parking was again the topic of the afternoon break, as I announced the information I received.

That night, I wrestled with the issue. Should I comply with the principal’s request? Doing so seemed foolish, had nothing to do with my teaching, but it would identify me as compliant and a team player. Or I could stand on principle, assert my independence, and risk an on-going rift with my boss.

I decided to delay the moment of decision as long as I could by persuading my pool to arrive much later than usual.

I drove into the parking lot in amazement. Only the vehicles of the principal and vice-principal were facing in. the rest of the staff, every one of them, was facing out.

by Chris Harker

