

"Mr. Owens is a very fine teacher.

He is a loyal and dedicated member of my staff.

He is an asset to our school"

Edward C. Moore, Principal

Compton High School

UNDER THE FIRST OF CIRCUMSTANCE

Paul T. Owens

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By

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Joe in his speech for student body president, praised each
of the six people running against him,
spoke of how good a person each was,
said he didn't know what he could do
as president, except tell the students nicely
what the administration wouldn't be able to tell them
nicely.

He had no other qualifications and said everyone
running against him could do it as well as he could,
and that he would vote for the person he thought
needed most the title "student body president"
next to his or her name when they applied for college.

In a tightly wrapped blanket
Tina sleeps on the steps
leading up to the front of the school
her head resting on a jacket puffed
pillow
the morning after her mother had sold
her bed,
her clothes, and told her
she was dead
because she had gone and gotten
the abortion;
Tina lying in her new angled way,
waiting the alarm
of the sun rising clock
upon her face.

Only one pull up, Jason Manover ?

Is that all you can do?

You're almost 12 and you

Can only do one, Jason!

The girls were watching

And still you could only

do one.

You'd like maybe to go

stand over there

with the girls

and watch the boys

do them?

I get paid for being mean to kids every day—

Kids I could love
but put in front of me all day long,
in groups of raucous sounds and laughter
in my ear

and I get paid for being mean.

Let them grow their colds and coughs and sneezes
into your face, one after the other
and you'd know why I get paid for being mean.

Put more of them in my classes
make things bigger and bigger,
let all of them sit
closer and cozier together
and see me meaner for being mean.

And all they want to know
While I am mean is
are they good
and I get paid for being mean to kids
who have much good to them
but all that good gets lost
to be nice to
when placed all together
so I can be mean.

Only one who knows the fast and loud noise
of machinery can know
the sound of too many children
in one place.

Just give fifty reasons why not
For what you planned
why for
and you'll see
why you get paid for being mean.

How can the human voice make such demands
on other's ears?

Tell a kid
Once
twice
three times
four times

how to when to when not to
watch out! stop that!

No, move this – yes, yours
and watch how mean you get from not having
the chance to be nice
for being mean.

"Can I go to my locker to get my glasses?"

"Sit down. No one leaves class. You know that."

"But I have to. I can't see without them."

"You should have thought about that before."

"I know, but I forgot them this time. I'm sorry."

"The rule is that no one leaves, so no one leaves."

"I'm sorry. I told you; I'm sorry."

"That doesn't change anything."

"Why not? I admit I forgot."

"Yes, but we have rules to follow and one of them is that you don't leave. It's right to obey rules, isn't it?"

"But this time. Just this one time. Pleases" she said, jumping up and down and whining; and as the teacher turned to walk away, she grabbed his arm and gently turned him around.

"At home I can get my glasses."

"I do not think your parents know the difference between right and wrong with you anymore."

"At least we don't have rules that can't be broken for a good reason."

Heather was taken
off the floor
at the dance, when she couldn't go
on by her own wits,
the beer having shaken her head dizzily,
her arms hanging at a low-slung angle
from a friend's shoulder;
Heather was the newest shame of the school,
dressed as she was in school colors--
without pride and for the sake of fun--
embarrassing the people who made the discipline.
Heather degenerated before everyone
but woke up to the smile
that everyone liked her more for what had happened,
and she promised herself she wouldn't be a
stiff, stuck-up, smiling, love-me-everybody cheerleader
ever again.

The head coach sent his assistant
into the dressing room
at the state championship meet
to tell the team he wouldn't be at the meet
because coaching wasn't good for him any more,
that his wife would leave him if
he stayed with it one more minute,
that he was sorry for abandoning them now,
but he had to think of his family.
He wished the team well,
would pray for them,
said they should remember everything
about life and wrestling he taught them,
that he still believed everything himself,
but couldn't be with them, that his life was completely
out of his hands now and he was sorrier than they
could imagine – sorry. . .
sorrier.

Hayman, give me your paper,
You're cheating
Let me have it
right this minute!

All right, class, who else
is cheating? . . .
No one answers, Hayman,
so I guess you're
the only one.

I caught you cause you're a sneak,
Hayman. If I didn't keep a close
watch on you, you'd crawl right out
of here.
And I caught you because
I don't like you.
Anyone who makes me
watch them like a hawk, I don't like.
Got that, Hayman? Got that?
As long as you're in my class
I'll watch everything you do. Understand?

I'm not the only one!
How come you only caught me?

You just wanted to catch me,
didn't you?

I am so far behind,

-No you're not,
you're only doing
the best you can, you
do not have to do as well
as others

I am, but I am so far behind
everybody else...

-You're not behind anyone
because you can only do
as well as you can.

I know, but...

-No one is ahead of you,
they're only doing
as well as they can.

But, I am still behind!

Why are you so upset:
Because we still don't know?
Either find us a new way to learn
or forget it.
Don't teach it to us at all.
Maybe we can't learn,
or you can't teach,
but don't get so upset about-it
because it will kill you,
and it doesn't do us any good
to see you
not take very good care of yourself.

Marvin is the same one
who everybody's thrown out of everywhere he's gone,
and now your not letting him back in school
is going to give him one more reason
to one day steal everything,
and never learn it doesn't belong to him,
until they shoot him dead,
or put him away in jail;
and you had a chance,
a better chance than anybody to care for him,
and nobody cares about Marvin but the police.
You put one more Marvin out in the street for the police
to look after, and don't go telling him it wasn't your fault.
Your school, big as it is,
has enough room for one more to handle,
and you could have said yes to him
when he said, 'Please, give me another chance, just one more, please.'

On the third time
Gynella was caught
Smoking,
She was suspended from school
for ten days.
Her mother took it all very
easily, called the baby sitter,
told her that it wasn't necessary to come
for the next ten days,
went to the store
with two thoughts on her mind:
how much money she would save
not having to pay the babysitter,
and how many cigarettes
Gynella would want to smoke
while she was at home.

"Would you help me clean up the room? I would really appreciate it."

"I knew you didn't like me. I always knew it. Ever since I came into this class, you never liked me."

"That isn't so. I don't dislike any of my students."

"That's not true. You like everybody but me."

"Why? Because I asked you to help me?"

"Not just that. I got a low grade on my last notebook.

You just don't like me, face it.

But I'll help you clean your room,

Since you asked so nicely.

I'm just glad I know for sure now
how you feel about me."

"Why do you give us homework, anyway? No one likes to do it. It makes us hate everything we are supposed to learn."

"Your parents like you to do it. They know that if you're busy, you won't bother them like you bother me through the crazy dizzy day."

"You mean my mom and dad want me to have homework?"

"Right. They're the ones who'd be upset if you didn't have any."

"You mean my parents don't like me, either? Is that what you're trying to say? Go ahead, say it."

"I don't know about that. Don't ask me how your parents feel about you, ask them."

The child was causing the mother to be late
for the opening of school:
a low-to-the-ground heavy 6-year-old
she couldn't carry anymore;
so she dragged him,
shoes on their sides,
he tugged on her hands
for barely support;
and when his feet stumbled on an uneven
concrete block, causing her to break
her awkward struggling rhythm,
she stopped, and focusing
on his behind,
hit him,
halfway between a fist and an open hand
as the other children
stopped
to look on.

BECOME FAMOUS!

The notice said.
Write down your opinion
How dogs are treated
on school grounds--

dogs who have not bitten anyone,
dogs who are just loving, walking, curious, simple
people with four legs,
dogs who are quieter than the rest of us,
dogs who keep us constantly reminded
that we don't belong
in school.

YEAH DOGS!

Sooooo

Support your local
DOG
And make yourself and the rest of the world

FAMOUS!

"Vote dogs into campus life."

The tent was four-pointed
and put up in three hours for the festival
by the children, while their chubby,
peach shaped teacher shrieked directions.
She was new
and did not know not to scream
and took everything her students did
personally;
so when the tent fell,
she plopped to the grass
and her face fell into her hands,
tears streaked her face,
while she tried to cover
her visible frustration
and the students came over
to comfort her.

Red owned some small money to Ellis,
who kept asking about it
in front of a lot of people.
And Red became more against paying
each time Ellis asked.
Red got mad once and told Ellis
if he didn't stop,
he would never get it,
that he was out to make him look bad.
But Ellis didn't care how Red looked,
He wanted his money, and warned Red
he would get a gun if he didn't pay him
now.

“Right now, man.
Your money is starting to get to me,
'cause I don't have it yet, and it's mine.”

“It ain't yours, cause I ain't
gonna give it to you.”

The teacher told them to stop, and they did.

Ellis left, mad—

Said he would get Red good,
and came back in twenty minutes
and didn't ask Red anything, just told him,

“Sucker, you got my money,”
pointed a gun at his chest, pulled the trigger, and ran.

He parked
in the middle of the entrance to the school,
and when the teacher told him to move,
he said
he wouldn't be told what to do
unless it was nicely said.
"I'll give it to you nice! Now move it!"
The boy began
to walk away.
The teacher grabbed
his arm,
and the boy turned
and grabbed his suit
and flung him to the ground.
The teacher got up,
took a leg of the boy
and dragged him back to the car,
yelling, "How nice!"
and "Now the car will move!"

Taylor was taken
Out of the classroom
because students
and parents complained
he could not manage a class.
But he could not be fired
for he was tenured: permanent status!
So the principal, after trying
to get him to another school,
created a position for him,
guarding the campus.
He was known officially
as “fire director,”
while paid as a regular teacher.
and pulled the fire alarm
once a month
for the practice fire drill.

Mr. M. accused John B.
of not writing his term paper of 25 pages,
said it wasn't his own writing;
 he hadn't matured yet
 to do "this well."
And Barth informed him that
 he, Mr. Montra, had not been taught
 how to accept the work
 of students who might be
 smarter than himself.
At which Mr. Montra turned
flushed red of face
and told Barth
he'd better leave
and come back with respect.
 "When they bring on someone
 who treats us right and
 is not insulted by our thoughts."
Mr. Montra tightened his body sharply
and rocked back and forth in his chair;
and as silence of the class
 got stiller,
 he got up,
 took his book
 threw it into his briefcase,
 pulled the handle of it
 quickly to his side,
 grabbed his coat
 and umbrella
 and keeping his face
tight
took long, stiff strides
to the door.

He was a coach –
Not for the money
But for the spirit
he could generate out of himself,
out of the kids.
And it was good –
good for him
good for the kids.

But it wasn't enough.

He could not win –
No matter his enthusiasm,
his understanding,
he could not produce.

So they offered him a job
in the new office running the school,
with more money,
more prestige

which he didn't want,
couldn't work for,
while concerned with everybody
looking at him,
believing what one coach said:
“Thou who mess up, move up.”

He told them
their arguing and fierce discussions
were the best way,
that all learning was a coming
out,
and that the classroom
was just another place to let it
come out,
that as their teacher, he taught them
nothing,
just gave them
a chance to find out what was already there.

The teacher could give the boy
only one reason to stay in school:
 that he would wind up in the street
 like his brother—
which he didn't like to hear
because he
 liked his brother
and was proud of the trouble he made.

Because the world was out
to get both of them
 and it didn't matter,
 it didn't make any difference
where they'd get him—
 in school
 or out.

But the world was out
to get them.
And that was how he walked,
and he didn't care
 Where.

It was windy, very windy, too windy-
Yet he insisted they practice
outside on the grass in their uniforms.

“You're the worst band I've ever taught or ever heard.

None of you, I'll bet practice at home

So you're not going home

until I hear something worth listening to.

You're not going to embarrass me again.”

And they played with paper and sand blowing into them—
the trumpets, saxophones, trombones filling up
until the boy on second trumpet
stopped, raised his hand, yelling
“Do you think we could practice in the gym,
since we're going to play there tomorrow
for the basketball game?”

“No.”

“Well, why are we out here? Are you trying to punish us
for what we can't do? Maybe we shouldn't play at all.”

“Shut up! This is my band, and I run it the way I want to.

When you run a band, you run it the way you want to,
and see if you can do it any better.

“You know what you can do with your band!” and he started
to walk off.”

“Stand right there! Don't go anywhere!

I didn't say you could leave.

Now here is somebody who will never

Amount to anything: he's a quitter.”

And the boy walked off.

The others listened, scared, wanting the nerve
to be a quitter.

The sand into their eyes, they put
their mouth pieces back into their mouths
and began playing.

The teacher told the boy to begin running down the hill.

“No,” the boy said,

“I am not running
down any hill—“

“Yes, you are!”

“I am not!”

“You’ll do like everybody!”

“I won’t!”

“You will ‘cause I am running too!”

“No!”

And the man pushed him
into a patch of sticking bushes—
told him he’d better get up and run—

which the he did,

blood running from the openings

the bushes had made

on his face—

the man following behind.

Star, I am giving you this grade,
giving it to you, 'cause someone's
got to do something for you, Star,
before you'll do something for
yourself.

The red-headed girl waited for the teacher
to stop his rage at her--
calling her a sneak,
the likes of which he had never seen,
ever,
(a distinct deliberate
threat to his rule)
She asked politely,
smiling,
if he was finished
and capable
of listening to her side.

The girl waited and waited and then said,
“I didn’t think you could or would.”

The teacher told the board of education
how teachers were trained
to teach,
not stay after school
to watch—
to supervise activities that were not related to subjects.
“Hell!” a board member spoke, getting out of his seat,
“I would rather you see this thing
as who’s going to sit with our kids:
 Us or you?
Teachers can stay later.
That’s what we’re paying your for.”

I don't have to read
'cause my big brother
doesn't read
and my cousin doesn't read
and they're as big
as I want to be.

After a conference on
the relative closeness of
Overwhelming Strictness
and
hate
the principal wrote,
on a large cardboard poster
he tacked to the bulletin
in the faculty room:
"Those who hate kids
have the discipline problems,
Those who hate themselves
don't want to be here.
Anyone needing my help
See me."

The girl said she was sorry,
knew her teacher
was mad,
said she'd be good.

The teacher said she didn't
have to be good,
she only had to be
quiet.

“Shut up and sit down -- right now!”

he yelled to two students.

“You don't like us,”

one of them said.

My mother told me never

to use that word.”

Julie got permission
from herself
to be late, not from anyone.
She said
she didn't need a note
from anyone excusing her
for being late.
No one needed to give her permission
to be late,
she was her own
excuse:
"I gave myself permission."

Stephens, the assistant administrator,
was a father and mother to many of the students:
 had them over to dinner often,
 social-calendared them,
 disciplined them
 as a parent,
 gave them advice,
 ran their lives,
 cried at graduation when they left,
 while they were at college,
 went to their weddings,
 and gave final approval of their mates.

Karen's father found the kitchen dishes
uncleaned in the morning.
The ones she had promised to do
the night before
and would not take her to school
so she walked
and was late to take her final examination.
Her teacher told her she would let her
take it another time only
if her father called
and confirmed
her story.

They use words
they don't understand;
use the sentence
as an excuse
to hold the words
together.

But don't know how
to put words
in a way
to tell
what they think they're saying.

They have no motivation
to write it
Right.

They don't want
the responsibility.

Their only obligation is
The confusion
They have to offer.

The child was 10 years old
and played
during the summer
at school in the morning
with a teacher who
he didn't feel it was fair
to get three times the money
his mother made
for sweating in a laundry
while the teacher
taught him
what he thought
his mother should.

He told them on the first day
it was all simple,
that grades were already
determined,
that there wasn't much
they could do about it, no matter how well
they learned,
grades were based
50% on how much he liked them
and
50% on the two examinations
and each of the two was based
90% on how much he liked them.
The students were told that
grades would be given,
nothing would be earned:
"I give them, you get them,
and it is almost completely true that
the A's are for God
the B's are for me
the C's, D's and F's
are for everyone else—
but don't worry! We're here
to give ourselves
a good
and creative
time.

Wrestling coach hired for that mainly,
Won the state championship—had to teach geometry,
hated it
one week ahead of the kids,
and gave points for grades
to those who sold candy
for wrestling uniforms.

The principal was
not concerned with
a teacher's
background;
only wanted
people who could
relate to kids,
cared less about
subject matter
or training methods
or lesson objectives.
“The method,” he said,
is personality,
and I transfer out of the school
every teacher I can
whose personality
doesn't mix well
with the kids.”

I don't want to
hurt your feelings,
Mom,
but you seem
more interested
than me,
and I really
think you care
a lot more
about all of us learning
than I do,
no matter
how hard I
know you're trying.

Krisandra caught
for forging a note that she was sick,
was brought in by the teacher
who had caught her
and told if she continued to do this,
she would one day write
bad checks and would
lie her way out of even
bigger things.

Her parents were called in
and listened to the teacher
make his predications to them,
and her father told him
it was none of his
damn business
what she did.

Her mother sat surprised, but
proud.

Nancy was found
writing graffiti
on the walls of the girl's room.
And when her mother
came to learn of the situation,
she objected
to any type of punishment.
"My child is fourteen
and is going through changes
that come normally,
and she has to break rules
to express herself,
and you people at school
have to
make allowances for that.

Mrs. Mary,
I stayed later
To tell you I
love you cause
everyone would laugh
at me
and you're
the only one
I can tell.

Tyrone could not
be put back a grade or two
to learn to read,
because the school felt he was too
big and, emotionally, would be worse
for not going on with his friends.
But teachers didn't want him in class;
he tried to disrupt everything
the class tried to do.
One teacher had a plan:
Asked him to read,
he said no,
asked him the next day,
he said no
and never came back to class.

Students were given
tests once a year
to see how well
they compared to students
in other schools,
in the city and state.
Each teacher gave the tests
their students
And gave the results
To the principal.
Teachers concerned with maintaining
an image
that they were
the best
went over the test with the students
before
so no one could score less than
90%
of everything right.
The students, they were sure
would say nothing.
their final grades being greatly influenced
by how well they did on these tests.

miss sharon
how much you get paid
for being with us,
five dollars?

if all I got was
five dollars
i'd give it to you
and let you do my work.

5th and 6th grades

“What grade are you in?”

“5th. What grade are you in?”

“6th. There really isn’t much difference.

Just the questions they ask.”

Linda wrote
a note to her teacher
she wanted to throw away
but didn't:
that he looked like and thought
like her father
and that he made her
think of him,
and "that's all I get
at home,
and I can't have it
all the time."

The sign said,

NO STUDENTS IN THE EQUIPMENT ROOM

And that means

YOU!

--which wasn't him.

His father, the vice-principal, told him to

PUSH FOR EVERYTHING YOU CAN

And

USE EVERYTHING YOU WANT!

And when he came out, the teacher asked

if he could read,

and he said, "Yes,"

and the teacher wanted to know

why he went in,

and he said,

"MY NAME IS RANDALL!"

The teacher known
for good disposition and humor
thumb on her nose
bent down over the boy and said
“Sure, I’ll fight you, Put ‘em up,”
and he flung his fist on her face
in between the nose and left eye.

Mr. D. wove
science into English,
took math and grew art into it,
gave history “now” metaphors
for spinning away with wind-up
carousels of imaginations.
Mr. D.—the first “yes”
on everyone’s acclaiming tongue—
went to become principal
and was good for everyone,
much in favor of new ideas
and enthusiasm for unselfish thought,
so infectious
no one argued or became
verbally combative.

Said the man who attacked the officer
for beating the boy
who ran across the field naked after graduation.

“I am an ex-marine,

I am a flag waver,

I am a no-nonsense guy;

But—

I just snapped

When I saw the cop beat that kid

who was just standing there

naked and scared

with handcuffs tied behind his back

out in the stark cold

with everybody looking at him.”

Jackson, a new and young teacher,
with energies directed
towards collecting higher salaries
and general complaints
about the handling of the school,
was judged by his superiors
as inadequate.
The summary about him
Spoke of how
It was not conceivable
He could do well
In the classroom
If his interests were so preoccupied
In the teachers' cause,
That students were sure
To be suffering because of his own
Personal interests.

The door to the boys room flung back
and hit the building
as Dan
darted down the hall, Cindy,
his girlfriend running after him
and into him
when he stopped suddenly,
grabbed her as she began to fall
laughingly to the ground.
Both got up, climbing into each other,
as the vice principal looked on,
yelled at them to stop
their horseplay.
“But we’re not being horses,”
Dan objected.
“We’re having fun,” the girl said
and kissed Dan on the cheek.
“Don’t do that here!” the man demanded,
and as he started to separate them,
Dan reached across to try to
kiss her again,
but taking each of them by the arm,
the man walked to his office,
where he wrote a report that
they had used affection to the point
of insubordination,
underlining the words:
“with one last kiss.”

Harris, the geography teacher,
Was told
by the principal
that if he wanted
to look up a girl's dress,
not to do it
when she would know;
that a woman had complained
her daughter could not learn
respect for authority
if the authority had no respect
for the girl as a child.

Spitting

was the main expression of the team
in the bus
on their way home
from the last game of the season.

and that soon was not enough.
Empty bottles were thrown
from the windows---
not directly at people but at passing cars—
and one lady
yelled to them to stop

The coach, distraught over the team's many losses
Told the driver to stop,
and demanded to know
who was doing it.

Six came forward, and the coach ordered them to get off
told them that he had taken a busload of
boys to play,
not a group of
animals, who didn't know how to lose.

The head Basketball Coach
married the girl
he helped his star player
get along with during the season, one year
after both graduated.

The boy missed two easy shots at the end of the basketball game
and the coach yelled
from the bench,

“That did it!

You ruined our chances!

Do you realized that, Johnson?

Do you realize we could have won?”

The coach threw his hands up
and walking in front of the bench,
looked at the clock
of time remaining in the game,
then threw a pointed finger right hand at him:

“You’re a joke, Johnson.

Anyone else in there

could’ve made ‘em.”

Later, after the players showered
the coach came to Johnson for an
explanation of his missed shots.

“What did you expect. You kicked the
best players off the team. You
got what you deserved.”

The band played at half time
longer than they were allowed,
and when the team came onto the field
the coach ran over to the band leader,
told him to get his idiots off.
The leader said he wasn't through,
had one more number he promised he'd let the kids play.
and the coach grabbed him by the coat,
Told him to get his ass off right now, and pushed.
The players, watching, started pushing the kids in the band,
taking their instruments.
The people in the bleachers began booing, and several of them
came onto the field to stop it, but soon were fighting
with the players and kids in the band.
Three men jumped on a player,
Ripped his uniform—
A lady got a helmet,
Put it on, and swung her purse at
anyone close.
It got good—
didn't want to stop—
nobody.

Julie and Ellory were
cheerleaders and deciding
before the game on things the cheering
sections would do
were met by John and Forrest,
two boys who were not good enough to make the team,
grabbed them and flung
them into the locker room where the
boys were dressing;
they both fought hard to get free,
Julie crying out closing her eyes,
Ellory breaking away from Forrest by
kicking him
and running out onto the field, Forrest following all the way.

The girls dressed
in football shirts and blue jeans
met in the morning
before the powderpuff game—
girls against girls—
and decided they would not play
unless the rules were changed,
and they could use foul language,
they spoke to the administration,
who told them it wasn't lady-like.

“But we want to play football
and that's not lady-like
to begin with,
and we have no intention of making it
lady-like.

If football means we get rough
and push each other around,
and if it makes us swear
then we want to do it—

all of it.

The rule was changed, but the game was
cancelled for the following year:
not just because
girls were hurt in practice
and in the game,
but for what one girl said:
“We were having too much fun, and they
couldn't stand it.”

“They started throwing papers
and books
and beat up
one of their friends;
I just sat there,

marked them down
as being present
and tried to keep safe.

I am not a psychiatrist
Or policeman,”

the substitute teacher wrote
of her day.

Janice would not move
to the front of the room
and the teacher said she'd better,
or she would have to
leave the class, permanently;
 that he had wasted enough energy trying
 to make the class suitable for her needs.
Janice said she wouldn't move,
and she wanted him to know how she felt.
He said he would listen,
and she made him promise
not to tell anyone else
about a letter she would write and give him tomorrow
about her feelings. The letter said:

 I am not about to move to please you.
 I think that if f—d up
 to make us move from our friends.
 If you move me, I will have a s—fit.
 You make me so ill, I can hardly wait until
 this class is over for me. You make me ill,
 did you know that?

The teacher was
glad she expressed herself, told her so
and that she was free to leave the class
or move to the front of the room;
that he was glad she hadn't said
out loud what she wrote,
that she would not have had
such a choice then.

What we say,
 what we mean,
 and what we're going to do
are three different things.
And as long as we don't do any of them,
 All three are true.

The coach ran into the track
 where the boy lay
 holding his knee,
 looking at the blood-scraped skin
 the crushed brick surface had made
 when he had fallen over the hurdle.

Flung the boy's arm away,
yelling at him to get up!—
finish!—

That he'd have plenty of time to hurt
when the race was over.

 The boy tried,
 pushing on the ground
 lifting, fell
 grimaced in pain,
and two boys who came to help him
were held back by the coach
as he watched the boy
 try again.

He had just gotten back from the war
and had seen scenes that made
coaching young boys basketball
less to be obsessed about,
and would not yell,
scream,
or treat
a missed shot or play
as the end
of a boy's life;
wouldn't make anybody feel
less for not playing well,
that everybody was only
doing and redoing life
to make it more and more
of their own kind of perfect.
He also told a newspaper reporter,
who inquired about his
passiveness from the bench,
that competition was
just one way of becoming a person,
that "I can just give what I can
and silently watch the rest, hoping."

The girl wanted to stay out of his class
and told her counselor
he wasn't good for her
that she would feel
intimidated---
that he was cruel and took out
all the things he couldn't get with women
on us.

A member of the school board,
The minister of a local church,
asked each of the teachers new to the district
at the meeting introducing them
what church they attended
and how regularly.

“Opportunities” is the name of the class where students
who aren’t acceptable tolerated in any other class
are given a chance
to get together
and make their own theme.

“Free time” is when students in Opportunity class
are allowed to go out in the hall
and have water at the fountain.

Nancy Sue tripped
coming down the mountain trail
200 yards from the end of the race
over the deliberate foot of Charles,
out from bushes beside the trail
so that one of the boys
would be first.

They would not let
Stephanie
play with them, not they!
For better than them she was,
So she had to watch,
and with enough envy
she went
to their lockers
to steal their gear,
so the day of the big game,
no one
could appear.

Mary, a famous school athlete,
did not come
to classes much.
On the road
traveling,
she got credit
for her classes
from the principal
for her work
because she had
“learned more
in the places she went
than in the classroom,”
he told a meeting of teachers,
who felt she wasn’t getting
everything they had to offer her,
and students who were also there
and wanted credit consideration
for trips they wanted to plan.

Mr. R. my grade is not
nice enough for my mother
to be nice,
and I am not nice, she feels,
and now I don't feel
I am nice,
but you can change
everybody's feeling about me.

On
a table in a local restaurant
with a stack of papers
next to him—term papers
(15 pages minimum)—he picked up
a few at a time, put grades on them
according to whether the student
was going to college or
how well he liked the student's personality;
returned to class, an hour later, had a student
record them in the record book,
passed them out, and listened to each student compare
how unfair or fair he was
in evaluating them.

Stanford, the school principal,
asked George, assistant track coach,
if he wanted to be
head track coach for the coming year and
George said no
And Stanford said
“You’re it,
you’re head track coach”
and George said he didn’t
want all the responsibility
and Stanford said he understood
but he was still going to be head coach
and George said he wouldn’t care how he did the job
and Stanford said that was alright,
“The kids will meet a lot of people in their lives who
don’t like what they do,
people who aren’t fully responsible for
what they do,
and one person here or there won’t make much
difference to them.
You’re it, you’ll do better
Than you ever expected;
I am sure.”

samuel was wrestling
with david
on the grass
in front of the school
and soon they were
fighting.
samuel
was kneeling him
as he smothered the back
of his head into the muddy grass
with his arms.

dr. vick,
the vice principal,
ran from his office
to break it up,
grabbing samuel
and throwing him off
which wasn't good enough
for samuel got up and
hit vick in the jaw
and slid his fist
up his face
where his glasses
fell off
and he dropped down
onto the sidewalk.

mr. lee
the wood shop teacher,
came to get samuel,
pinning him down
so that vick could get up
and lift samuel by his hair
up and
down
quickly into
the mud and grass
which was a good feeling
for vick
who didn't like guys
with long hair
anyway.

I get bad grades because I have bad teachers.
I shouldn't have to get
Bad grades because I have bad teachers, should I?
Or can someone give me one good reason why I should?

Mrs. C told her daughter
Wendy
if she got too good at
playing tennis
the boys wouldn't come
running after her
that the family would have to worry
about her
no matter how pretty she was,
"I'm not worried," she told her mother,
"If a boy can't handle what I like to do
and how good I am at it
than I don't want to be with him anyways."
"I hope you find someone who's not like
James; you know he broke the arms
on the trophies you have because he didn't
like you playing so well."
"How can you say that when he came to all the matches
and kissed me whether I won or lost."
"But what was he doing? Sitting around and
doing nothing, just getting jealous, that's all.
That's why he left you for that girl who
does nothing."
"Oh, mom. You're so wrong. I can't believe how
wrong you are."
"You call me wrong if you want, but James
goes with a girl who does nothing
and I'm sure of it."

The coach told the team
GOD was on our side this time,
that he didn't let us down
when Smith
made the last shot
that give the team
the game
and championship,
that all his prayers
had been answered
and he was
proud
he was their coach,
and Jacobs,
one of the players
who never played
wondered why
GOD had given the coach
the ability or the blessing to
win without him...

I know I won't do well
in Mr.C's class
mom,
he only smiles at the cute girls
and though I know you
always tell me how
pretty I am, you know I'm not
so don't expect me to get a good grade
in Mr. C's class
don't expect anything great.

I won't be yelled at for being honest.
You can yell at me for what I can't do
but I won't be yelled at for being honest,
the girl who records the basketball team's statistics
yelled at the coach who had yelled at her for
having a big mouth when she told the officials how
many fouls his team's players
had committed.

The boy told the school authorities
the only way he could listen to what they had to say,
what they wanted him to do
was for him to be loaded on some kind of drug
that he has had trouble with people telling him what to do,
that he gets along with his parents and everyone else better
if he doesn't have to discuss anything with them,
just to let them know he'll do what they say
but he has to be 'stoned' on something
so that he won't have to get upset and want to argue about it,
so whatever you want
whatever it is
it's alright with me.

The school would not pay
to hire a coach
for a volleyball team
so the mothers
 the fathers
of the boys who would be
on the team
wanted to raise money
to have a coach
and put together a sale of
“old clothes for a new coach”
in garages of two homes

and the coach sat on a high stool
sipping a can of beer
as people came by,
salvaging through the piles
looking at the clothes
back at the coach
back at the clothes,
deciding...

She better expect to
count on her looks to get by
because she won't make it on anything else.
She's always upset because she never
does her work, but then,
she looks good even when she's upset,
so maybe she doesn't have to do
her work.
Even when she tries to say
why she doesn't do her work
and doesn't know how to say it
she looks good,
(so how can you
expect her
to want to do well in school?)

You give a kid a D or fail him
and the kid's upset,
his parents are upset
(with the kid and maybe with you)
the school's upset, the community's upset,
you've lowered everyone's standards;
but you give the kid a higher grade
and everybody's happy,
the kid and the parents, and the school's
got high standards;
it looks like everyone's doing a great job.
A little simple marking of the pen and the
whole world's got something to
smile about.

Freddie didn't mind the teacher having pets, it
was only right to like some people more
than others, he conceded,
but what wasn't fair
was that the pets were always
girls and that no guys
were pets, even
for the lady teachers.
the guys
don't have a chance
Freddie figured,
it doesn't seem right,
and boys are nicer
and still,
none of us can be pets.