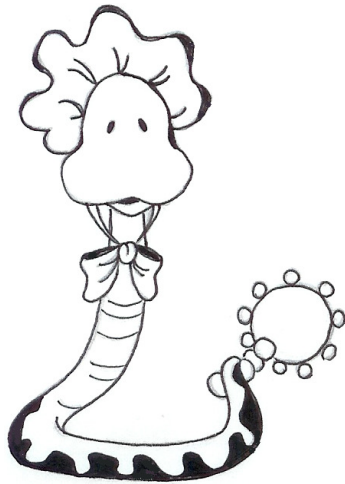


"Mom, Will You Sign My Permission Slip?"



Written and illustrated by
Jacqueline K. Fraifeld

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This book is the work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

This book is dedicated to the wonderful and amazing students who have made my life richer because they have spent time with me. I not only wrote this book because it was a dream of mine, I wanted to show my students that you don't have to be the best writer to write; You don't have to be the best artist to draw; You don't have to have a perfect voice to sing or possess a great talent before you play an instrument!

You just have to do it! Follow where your heart leads you and enjoy every minute of the life you have been given!

Make your own destiny.

May you always have wealthy hearts and as much joy as you have brought me.

Mrs. Fraifeld



School Spy

It wasn't the mess that the classroom was in that first caught my attention as I stepped through the door Monday morning. It was the SMELL! I knew immediately that the dead rat that I could not entice my snake to eat last Friday afternoon had been left by the door. Even though it was tied up in a trash bag, it had filled the room with the noxious smell of rotting meat.

It had been left by the door to remind me to drop it into the dumpster on my way to the teachers' parking lot....and by the door it had stayed...and stayed.

I taught in the temporary buildings out in the back of the school. As a new teacher to our campus, I had been assigned to the “T-Shacks” to serve my time. At first I thought it was a horrible place to be, but it didn’t take me long to see that I had lucked into the perfect place to teach!

Out in the trailer park, as my t-shack neighbors and I referred to our classrooms, no one bothered you. You could make noise and sing and laugh too loud, which I frequently did, and open the windows on a beautiful day to catch the breeze. The sound of rain on the metal roofs also brought a charm of its own, making the room seem cozier.....calmer.

I had a freedom that the other teachers in the main building could only dream of. No principals coming by to see if I was using the latest teaching fad in order to spiral my students to great success on the state assessment test. I could have parties when

I wanted to. We could play games and get just a tad too rowdy!

But best of all....the cherry on the top of the ice cream.....was that I could have animals in the room!



I had access to my room at nights and on weekends and could feed my pets and clean their cages. At the end of that school year, I eagerly signed a request to remain in the T-shacks.

It was soon after the beginning of the following year that the school was set up on an alarm system. Each room had a motion detector to alert the district's police department of any sneaky, unwelcome intruders, hungry for the bounties that an unattended classroom might offer.

The motion detector was small, about the size of a shoe box, and it sat in the top corner of my room by the door. It had a tiny green light shining from the middle of it. It appeared to be waiting and watching for any tale-tell sign of trouble in a school classroom that was closed for the night or weekend.

I had been very sad when it was announced that our possessions were now protected. I was sad because I had come up to my classroom almost every weekend to take care of my animals or do paperwork that had slipped my mind during the day.

When my own children were in High School, I would sometimes slip away from my noisy house on the weekends and go to my classroom refuge. There I could enjoy the peace and quiet and sanity of the teenage-free environment.

It was that green, hateful, watchful eye that peered from the gadget in the corner of the room that was trying to take away the freedoms I had come to love. The nosy light grated on my nerves.

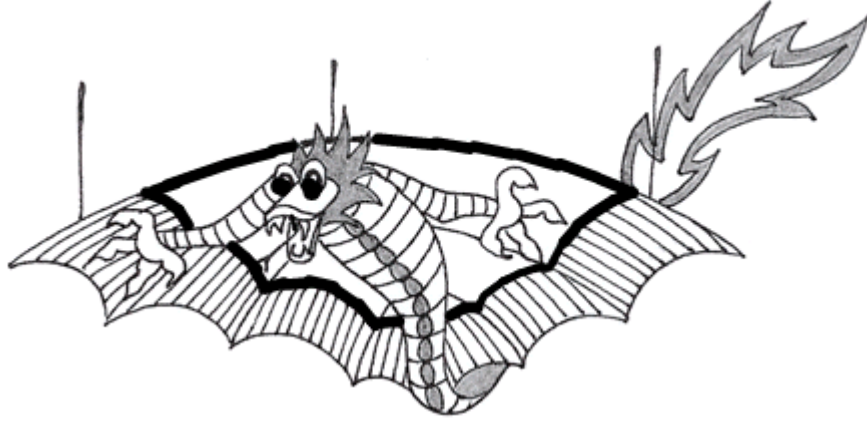


At first my plan was to just stay away from my classroom after hours. Compliance. I ask it of my students every single day. I DEMANDED it! The bossy light was now asking it of me. Being a responsible teacher, I was going to adjust to these new chains that were trying to bind me.

But not a single day passed that first week when a policeman from the district didn't ask me if I had been in the room after hours.

“NO! Of COURSE not!” I told the officer. “I give out rules in my classroom every day and expect the students to follow them! Surely you are not suggesting that I would be unwilling to follow rules that were given to me!”

After a week of having the alarm go off every night, someone came out to check on what was causing the movement in my room at night. Upon entering my classroom, they were met by the gentle swaying of wind-catchers, wind chimes, and the kites suspended from my ceiling.



I was told that the removal of them was imperative for the motion detector to be of any use. Any use? I never asked for it to be put in my room....to monitor the teaching atmosphere I had spent much time and energy creating!

I really, REALLY wanted my colorful decorations to remain attached to my ceiling. I had a magnificent dragon kite that was the centerpiece of my classroom, swaying lazily from side to side whenever the central air turned on. I had a



windsock that turned in circles like a corkscrew when the air hit it. My students and I found these things a magical part of my classroom.

OK.....even if I WAS willing to still the swaying of the ceiling decorations, I could not, WOULD not, still the animals! There was a four-foot ball python named Monty that slithered about his cage. There was a degu, a rat-sized squirrel-looking rodent that ran relentlessly on her wheel at night! There were turtles that got up and down off their small log in order to bask under their heat lamp! My room MOVED! I LIKED it that way!

So I decided to outwit the annoying, green-eyed spy. I covered it with cardboard. It was noticed by the police and promptly removed. For my next attempt, I strategically draped the Texas flag in front of it and taped the corners to the wall on either side of the motion-detector. Surely that would thwart the intruding eye with its evil attempts to control my freedom to come and go as I

pleased...to stifle my creativity and artistic license that proudly and boldly waved around my room every time the air conditioner turned on!

But I arrived the next morning to find the flag freed from the wall and a small note attached to my door letting me know that I had once again been caught trying to stand in the way of progress.

Nothing that I tried worked.

I won my freedom from the green eye because of the mercy and exasperation of the man at the controls of the motion detectors at the police station. He got tired of my antics, pleas, and ruses. He disconnected the motion detector in my room. The little green eye-light continued to shine at me, but it was blind and would no longer fetch the police to my room.

But this particular weekend I had NOT come to my classroom! I had big plans and didn't think about my school life for an instant, until, of course, I opened the classroom door Monday morning and

was almost knocked over by the stench of rotting rat.

And then, like the motion detector that had previously noticed even the slightest movement, the room started to come into focus. It was at that point that I noticed the flies.





2

Dancing Cactus and Confetti



Horseflies. The big, noisy, buzz-around-your-head-at-a-picnic flies. There were 50 of them! Maybe a hundred! Possibly a ZILLION!

The doors to the temporary classrooms have a gap between the base of the door and the floor. The two inch space serves as an entry to schoolyard creatures looking for a safe haven from the night weather.



Being out in the trailers, there were no protective halls to limit the access of bugs and critters. Nothing stood between my beautiful room and the great outdoors except for a poor-fitting door. This opening was not big enough for Monty to escape, but a mammoth opening for hungry flies to come in and delight in the forgetfulness of folks who forget to take out the trash!

They were all over the stinky room! And as my shocked mind started to focus on something other than the smell and dancing madness of the flies, I saw with horror the utter chaos that my beloved Monty had left in his wake.



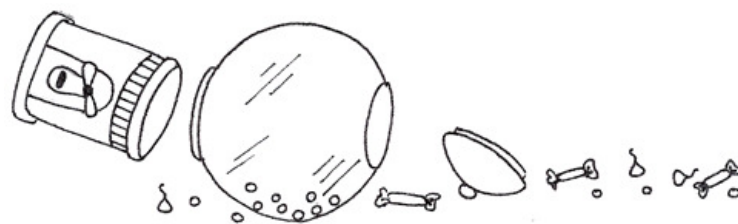
All of the m&m dispensers, toys, and dancing hamsters that my students had given me over the years had been knocked off the shelf and lay in a lifeless jumble on the floor. Why, everything that had once been on a flat surface seemed to have

jumped to the floor in attempts to escape the path of the slithering, wandering snake.

The dry erase markers that had been resting on the narrow shelf of the board were scattered on the floor as well as the erasers.

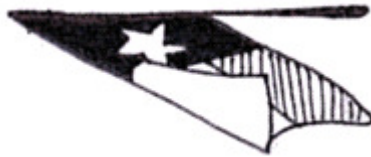
The picture I had drawn when in High School and had framed and leaned against the board had also taken a nose-dive to the floor. Glass had shattered and lay in a rectangular pattern around the wooden frame.

Next to the glass were about a hundred multi-colored foil-wrapped candies from a large bubblegum dispenser that had stood at the front of the room. They decorated the floor like confetti and would have actually looked rather pretty had there



not been an obnoxious smell accompanied by black buzzing flies all around my head.

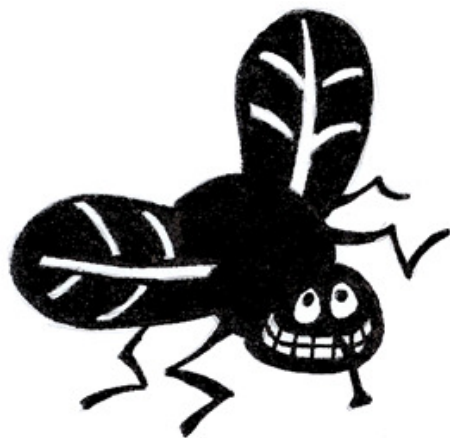
My eyes followed the apparent track that Monty had taken. The Texas flag had been dislodged from its holder and laid on the welcome mat by the door.



Things laid helter-skelter across the floor. There were the scales that I used to weigh the turtles, paperback books from a shelf of one of my bookcases, and dancing cactus toys that had sat safely out of reach of students who kept pushing the buttons that made them come to life and sing until I would scream, “Stop it!!!! I can’t take it anymore!”

I imagined them singing and wiggling as they dropped six feet to the floor while Monty continued his classroom journey. The battery of one had popped out and lay across the floor. A fly was sitting on it smiling at me. Amid the confusion and

mess and smell I found myself smiling back at it, finally realizing that all I ever had to do to shut up the dancing and singing cactus was to take out the battery. I made a mental note to trash all the batteries of noise-making toys in the room.



My eyes followed the path of the snake. Where the mess ended, surely I would find my mischievous python curled up, exhausted from the weekend romp, waiting to be picked up gently and placed back into his cage where he would rest on his heating pad.

There were slivers of snakeskin along his weekend path, but I could find no snake.



Now, that brings me to why Monty was out in the first place. He had been hungry the months of September and October and had eaten a medium sized rat every Friday. When a snake eats a lot, they grow a lot! Except that a snake has to shed its skin in order to grow and Monty was covered with a layer of gray, dead skin. His eyes were no longer black and shiny....they were cloudy and lifeless.

There are other signs that a snake is ready to shed its skin. They do not want to eat, hence the dead rat that Monty wouldn't eat that Friday. They will also stretch the skin around their heads to try to loosen it by opening up their mouths as far as they



can, showing their fangs. This is quite intimidating to the student who is holding him at the time.

There are other, more annoying things that a snake will do. Monty gets “squeezy”. He is used to being held by students during the day during math classes. The students know that in order to hold Monty, they must continue to pay attention to me and do everything that every other student is doing. When

the snake gets the attention instead of the math, the snake is given to someone who can handle both.

I keep telling the kids, “Monty can hold on to you. You don’t need to hold him. You are just another warm-blooded tree in his classroom jungle. So be a good tree and DO YOUR MATH!”



That brings us back to the “squeezy” part my classroom pet. Monty doesn’t like the feel of the dead skin on his body. He wants it off. It is like a bad sunburn that is itching and starting to peel. He stretches out...hanging on to you with his lower

body and extending his upper body straight out in the air. He looks like an arrow. It looks improbable that he can do that without falling like a rope towards the floor, but he can. Still, that isn't the problem. The problem is when he gets "squeezy".

Any other time you can drape him around your neck and he will check out your hair with his tongue (which is how he smells), or his tongue tickles the inside of your ear canal, or sometimes he finds your eyeball worth a quick tongue-tickle. But when he is covered with dead skin, his favorite thing to do is wrap around your neck and SQUEEZE. It reminds me of how a cat will STRETCH when it first wakes up. It makes him feel better. It doesn't do much for the kids.

There have been instances in my teaching where I have noticed that a student is looking a tad pink with the snake around their neck. They are looking.....uncomfortable. Arguably there is something a bit wrong with me that I find it sort of

funny to watch....but I don't watch too long before I get the other students to help Monty quit squeezing their neighbor's neck in hopes of getting the student's color back and their mind redirected towards math again.



Monty was being unusually squeezy and I felt that what a 4-foot, itchy, dead-skin-covered snake needed was a weekend crawl/slither in the classroom!

The first time I saw the benefit of his free-range adventure was when a 6th grader did not put the lid back on Monty's cage securely. Monty escaped and the next morning I followed the trail of skin that he left behind his traveling. I found him curled up behind one of the bookcases sleeping peacefully with a brand-new, bright-colored layer of skin covering him!

The next several times I let him loose on purpose because he needed to enjoy the great-indoors to help him over the "squeezes". Each time I found him in his favorite ending-up-place. It was always behind the six-foot bookcase where the dancing cactuses perched proudly on top wearing their bright yellow sombreros and black sunglasses.

It seemed so predictable and Monty seemed to enjoy the freedom! It also cured his desire to squeeze. I thought the kids would appreciate that.

This time, however, something had gone awry. His "ending-up-place" was empty. The

cactuses that had once been on top of the bookcase were now laying like wounded soldiers on the floor. I asked myself, “HOW did the cactus get pushed off of the bookcase? AND WILL SOMEBODY DO SOMETHING ABOUT THOSE FLIES?!”



It was 7:30 in the morning. My room smelled horrible. My floor was covered in glass and toys and candy. But worse than this, I had a meeting in 10 minutes with the head of our department and a parent.

It got worse. The Assistant Principal had told me that she had planned on coming to do a classroom observation sometime that day.

This was NOT my idea of a great way to start a Monday.

Another teacher who also worked out in the T-Shacks came up the ramp towards the classrooms. She saw my wide-eyed panic and smelled my room. Telling me to open my windows and drop the temperature in the room to 65 degrees, she ran to her room to get her air freshener.

As she sprayed my room with apple-cinnamon air freshener, I ran the dead rat carcass to the dumpster. By the time I had gotten back, the flies were indeed leaving out the windows. It seemed that they prefer the heat of a Houston morning to a room being cooled to 65 degrees!

The room smelled like candied rat. There was nothing I could do about that. The kids would just have to understand. I wasn't worried about the kids. I was worried about the missing python and the visit by the Assistant Principal.

I ran to the meeting with the windows of my room gaping, showing the flies to the place they had

come from. The enticement of the dead rat had been moved to the dumpster.

I nodded frequently during the meeting and tried to look as if my mind was anywhere other than where-oh-where could the new ending-up-place be in the room? Thankfully, no one asked for my professional opinion on the kid we were meeting about. I would have sputtered, “Flies! Snake skin! Stinky room!”

My first period class understood what must be done. They were to each take a rolled up file folder and swat flies while they helped me empty bookcases and move furniture. We were all searching for a sleeping Monty behind one of them.

There was math on their desks with instructions to run to their desk if the Assistant Principal were to come by, shaking their heads knowingly at the worksheet, as if some great mystery of math had been unlocked for them. We

teachers like to call this an “ah-ha” moment. I just wanted to find Monty!

The snake was not behind the furniture. The snake was not in the couch that we had turned upside down. But there was something that a student noticed: One of the ceiling tiles had been partially pushed to the side. One of the ceiling tiles directly underneath where the Texas flag had fallen out of its holder to the floor.





Out of Sight, Out of Mind

I looked up. I suspected that my snake had indeed managed to scale the wall, using various things to help boost it upward, and then he disappeared behind the ceiling tiles. It took a minute of utter disbelief and amazement to wrap my mind around this idea, but it was pretty hard to avoid that conclusion.

I had to tell the teacher next door. She was a long-term substitute for one of the regular teachers who had taken time off to have a baby. Actually, I felt pretty lucky because I was very sure the substitute would handle the news of a python slithering above her head a LOT better than the actual teacher.

She took the news as well as could be expected. She momentarily crouched down and peered up towards the ceiling. I tried to assure her that I was pretty sure that unless there was an opening, the snake couldn't come down in her room. The snake could push a ceiling tile up from underneath, I said, but I could hardly imagine an armless snake prying a tile upward once he was in the ceiling.

She gave me a slow look of wonder. "Did you think it could climb up the wall and get into the ceiling in the first place?"

Her point was well taken.

“Uh, no,” I said. I hadn’t actually thought about that until then. So I hurriedly added, “Well, if he does come down in your room or even falls through a ceiling tile on one of your students, will you call me or one of my students rather than the custodians?”

I was not too sure what the custodians’ response would be. They have exterminator instincts when it comes to mice or rats in the building. I could not see that it would fare very well for my snake.

The other thing was that I did NOT want the school...ok, the principal.....to know that I had misplaced my snake. I was relatively sure that he would not be as understanding as my students. I needed to keep the disappearance under wrap.

“I would REALLY like to keep this our little trailer-park secret, if you don’t mind,” I said to my neighboring teacher with a grin. She looked at me incredulously and said that SHE would say nothing.

She was right. I didn't have to worry about what she said. My students, those well-meaning, good-natured kids would EXPLODE the news when the bell rang to end class.

I was in a dilemma. A middle-school kid will look you right in the eye and with complete and utter sincerity tell you they will keep a secret....but then they get near their friends and they "change". It is that unpredictability that has always kept me laughing and enjoying that age group.

Now it made me just plain nervous.

I needed to put the missing snake out of my mind. I had a class to teach, and the bottom line was that worrying about this would NOT produce a snake.

My students would become overly rowdy if I didn't calm things down quickly. My classroom resembled an Easter egg hunt at a Sunday picnic. Go figure.

So everyone took their seats and I finally got the chattering to stop. I had started to practice the multiplication songs that I had tortured my students with since the first day of school. They didn't overly like to sing them, but they were compliant. It also helped them become better math students and they were smart enough to appreciate that.

I was running through the songs and noticed that not only were the students' eyes darting around the room checking for the slightest movement, but mine were too. We looked like a group of nervous trick-or-treaters huddled together in a haunted house.

Then my mind started to wander and I was imagining what would happen if the Assistant Principal walked in just now and sat on the comfortable couch in the back of the room.....observing this group of very jumpy people.

And I could see it in my mind's eye. The python, slithering around on top of the ceiling tiles,

finds a weak portion of a tile and breaks through the ceiling and plummets on the unsuspecting Assistant Principal below. I just started to laugh! How would I explain to her family that it wasn't MY fault that she had a heart attack!



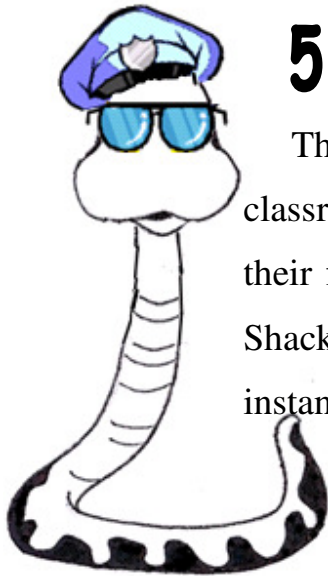
The bell was going to ring in just a few minutes. I had to make my plea to the kids.

“Look, guys, no one needs to know about this little missing-snake-thing situation. I am sure that Monty will turn up momentarily and before you know it, he will be right back in his cage where he belongs! Let’s not worry everyone! It will be OUR LITTLE SECRET!”

They all promised. I looked out on that sea of wonderful, sincere, well-meaning faces and I felt better.

The bell rang and the kids ran off to their next class. I was thinking about how I would distract my next class from noticing that Monty wasn’t in his cage. I didn’t have to think long. In came Football-Boy, one of my students that played quarterback on the football team, and says, “So, you lost the snake?”

It was going to be a LONG day.



5 Mr. Cool

The kids had piled into the classroom with enormous grins on their faces. The ramp up to the T-Shacks had become a place of instantaneous information exchange. The students looked positively giddy as they imagined how math could not possibly be taught with a slithering, exploring, meandering serpent above their heads. Surely there would be cookies and punch served to celebrate this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

I assured them all that not only was doing work possible, anyone who did NOT comply with that request would have lunch detention.

I could see the look of “spoil sport” on their faces directed at me.

“Look guys, this is not going to go well for me when the principal finds out that Monty sort of escaped,” I told them. “He won’t be sad that we have lost a beloved classroom companion. He will be thinking along the lines of worried parent phone calls and the expense of having to get the maintenance department to come to our school and get the snake out of the ceiling,” I went on.

“He just isn’t COOL like we are,” I added. I wasn’t trying to be disrespectful towards our fearless leader, but honestly, word out there was that he wasn’t the coolest dude in the hallways. That is not to say he wasn’t a good principal. He was fair and consistent with his expectations with the kids....but “cool” didn’t come to mind when I thought of him.

I was thinking of when I first got Monty two years ago. He was little then....no more than eight, skinny inches. The person I bought this snake from

had told me to expect him to reach five feet in length when he was done growing.

It was because of that bit of news that I thought it might be prudent of me to get the principal's blessing, while the snake was just a little whipper-snapper, a shadow of his adult stature. Hardly scary-looking.

Luckily, the principal's father had been a teacher who enjoyed having pets in his classroom. That would help him be a bit more open-minded to the idea of the new classroom pet.

I found out this information about his dad the year he came to our campus. I only had cute, old guinea pigs. They had been there before, so he had no problems with them remaining there.

A snake could well be another matter. And because it was going to join the school under his watch, he might choose to veto the idea.

I put on my most responsible, professional face. I kept it hanging on a hook by my classroom

door for just such instances like this when it would help me. My students weren't overly fond of it, but they knew that it was handy if their behavior warranted it.

I found the principal in the hallway monitoring student behavior as they passed from one class to the other between bells. I strolled over and asked about the new addition to my classroom in a casual, nonchalant manner, spreading my fingers six inches apart to try to give him a visual to work with.

I stressed how animals fostered responsible behavior in students. I pointed out how successful they had been in my room so far. I quickly added, "It isn't poisonous, or anything." I tried to smile with an air of confidence as I waited for his permission.

In the past, I had usually followed the rule that it is much easier to beg for forgiveness than to ask for permission. However, this snake was going

to be too big to say, “REALLY? It isn’t OK?! I had no idea you would mind!”

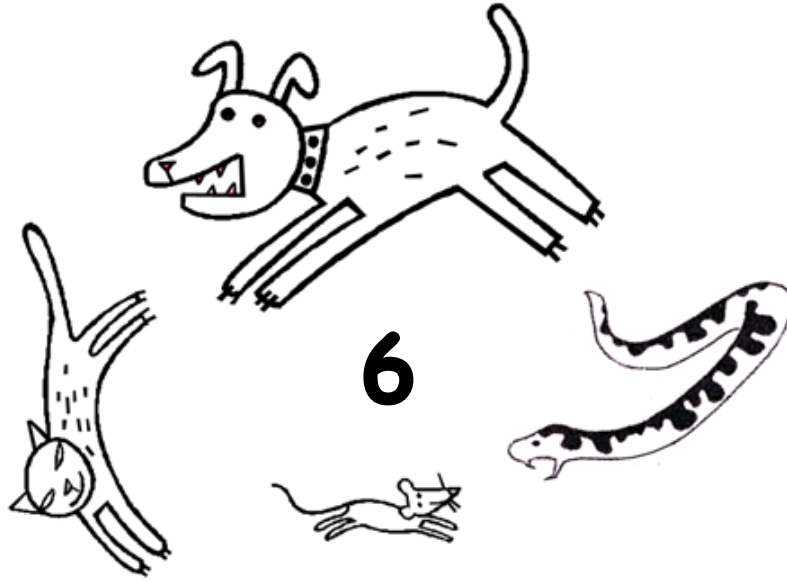
I saw his hesitation, but he did say I could have the snake. I gave him a small thank-you nod and tried to make a quick get-away. Before I got too far away, he said, “That snake won’t bite anyone, right?” I looked over my shoulder at him as I kept walking away and said, “Well, any animal COULD bite, but I just don’t see that happening.”

As I got about twenty feet from him and could see the hint of distress on his face, I added, “I am going to come up with a permission slip to give to the parents that will allow the students to hold him.” I thought I saw his face somewhat relax.

When I was out of earshot, I said “WHOO!” and took off my professional face. “We have a classroom snake!”

And I walked away as quickly as I could.

Animals in the Ceiling



Now Monty was loose and I was pretty sure that my professional face wasn't going to get me far with the principal. I mean, Monty hadn't bitten anyone, but knowing that a four-foot python could come crashing through the ceiling, possibly landing on poor kids whose parents never even SAW a permission slip, would not be a calming thought to a principal.

The class wanted to know what was going to happen to Monty up in the ceiling. “Excellent question,” I said.

I gave the students some worksheets and asked them to keep busy while I tried to find the answer to that very question. I emailed the band director at our school who I knew raised snakes and asked what he thought of my situation.

The answer was disheartening. Pythons are nocturnal animals. That means that they are awake and active during the night. Monty was hardly going to come out of the ceiling on his own. The worst part of the news was that a python Monty’s size could live for 12 to 14 months WITHOUT EATING!

I thought to myself, how could anything go for longer than half a day without eating? If I am half an hour late for lunch, I think I am going to die of hunger! If I had climbed up into the ceiling, all anyone would have to do to get me to come down is

remove a ceiling tile, yell “Ice Cream!”, and I would be jumping down with wild eyes and a grumbling stomach.

But not a python.

This was bleak. So my beloved snake would live up there all through the school year and through the summer before he would starve. For the entire school year, we would need to be prepared for Monty to come crashing through a ceiling tile on top of an unsuspecting student or teacher. The student would live, but a poor teacher is old and would most likely die of a heart attack. No matter how you look at it, I would have some explaining to do.

I gave the students the bad news. There was silence for a second and then a kid said, “Why don’t we put a rat up there so Monty won’t starve!”

I was trying to picture the principal’s face if he found out that I had let loose a rat in the ceiling in order to keep the snake from starving. “WHAT snake in the ceiling? How could your snake get into

the CEILING? How could a tiny snake like yours eat a big rat?” The more I thought about it, the worse the picture became.

And I looked at the kid and said, “And what if Monty doesn’t eat the rat and we have a rat up there running around?”

“Well,” one of the kids said, “then we could stick a cat up there to catch the rat!” I looked at the kids and added that we would then put a dog up there to catch the cat who we had put up there to catch the rat.....just like the song, “There Was An Old Woman Who Swallowed a Fly”.

“No, kids,” I said. “I am feeling like the news I just got from our band director is giving us little hope of Monty’s return. We still have a classroom pet snake, it just isn’t exactly IN the classroom, and we only have it for one year.”

We went through our lesson a little less happy than we usually were. Monty was a wonderful addition to the classroom. He helped to make sure

the kids wanted to come to class even if Math was not their favorite subject. He was an incentive for doing homework because if you weren't responsible enough to do your homework, how could you be responsible enough to hold Monty?

The bell for lunch was going to ring in five minutes. The students all started to put their supplies away slowly and sadly.

It was then that one of my students said, "What's that in the corner, Mrs. Fraifeld? It's moving!" I looked in the corner by my desk and saw what he was pointing at. It was little. It looked like a short piece of fat rope was dangling about three inches from the ceiling. I walked closer to look.

I just couldn't believe it. It was unbelievable. Monty had his head and a couple of inches of his body squeezed through a small hole in the ceiling tile above my desk! He was just looking out, calmly.

“Bring me a chair quickly!” I ordered. One of the students put a chair underneath Monty’s head. I worried for a second that Monty would get spooked by the commotion and withdraw his head back into the ceiling, but he didn’t. He just looked out of the hole, waiting for rescue.

I gently wrapped my hand around his head and neck. I carefully and slowly pushed up on the ceiling tile and moved it out of the way. He was there. All four feet of him was wrapped around something up in the ceiling. I firmly but gently pulled him towards me a little and then relaxed my grip.

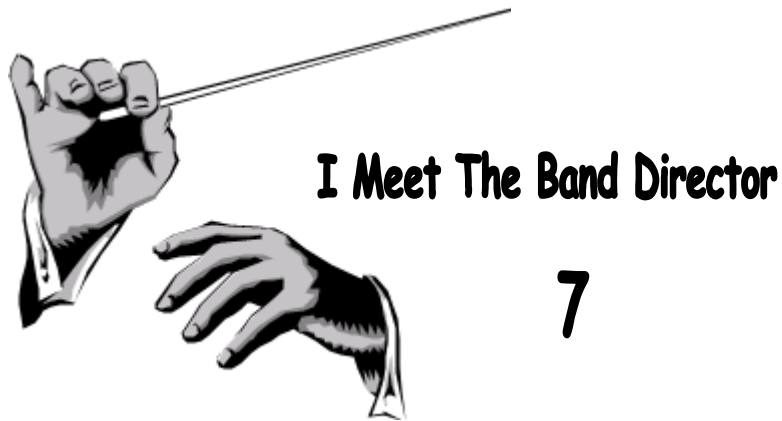
Monty allowed himself to let go of whatever he was holding just a bit and I had another few inches of him in my grip. I continued this to the cheers of my students and the complete delight to myself. Within a minute, we had our beloved Monty in our arms!

He was no longer covered with dead skin. He was absolutely beautiful with shiny eyes. The kids took him gently to his cage and placed him there on his heating pad.



Monty was thirsty. He had spent a very adventurous weekend doing exercise and had forgotten to take a water bottle!

This wasn't going to be such a bad Monday after all!



I got a snake because my 8th graders had BEGGED for one. The last of my guinea pigs had died at a ripe old age of seven, and they wanted something to replace it with that they could “relate” to.

A snake, they begged. A snake. I was terrified of snakes. I had told them at the time that I would TRY. And I did try. I went to my favorite pet store. It was small and owned by a friend of mine. I went to visit him on Saturday morning and told him of my dilemma.

“Sure, I have snakes!” he told me. I walked back to where there were several cages of anxious snakes with darting tongues trying to find the slightest opening in their cages to escape. Next to those were some cages of snakes curled up that looked asleep, and a couple of cages that looked empty because the snakes were hiding.

“Which do you want to hold?” he asked. “Uh, none of them,” I honestly replied.

He gave me that “wimp” look that I often give my students when they wouldn’t try something new or be willing to go to the board to show how they got an answer to a math problem. I recognized that look very well.

“I want to hold that one,” I said, pointing to a skinny, pink and orange colored rat snake.

It was about six inches long and seemed calmer than most of the others. It looked pretty, like the new multi-colored candy-canes that I always bought my students during the holidays. Better than

that, it looked sleepy. I decided that if I was actually going to have a snake put in my hands, a sleepy one was preferable to a wiggly, got-places-to-go snake. We would leave the wiggly ones for the other customers.

He reached in and got the brightly colored snake. It woke up and started whipping back and forth, no longer resembling candy, but like an insanely wild shoe-lace that the kids were wearing nowadays in their sneakers.

“Uh,” I managed to get out of my closed-up throat, “would a little snake like that bite?”

“Every animal will bite,” he assured me. “But it PROBABLY won’t.” Great. It “probably” wouldn’t.

But I am no wimp. You just can’t teach middle school and be a wimp. The kids will unite together in your classroom and go into search-and-destroy mode.

“Hand it over to me,” I said in my bravest voice. And hand it over to me he did. I held it. No, I held ONTO it. It was insane. It was worse than I had imagined it would be. I managed to keep my wits about me for approximately 30 seconds.

I know that 30 seconds doesn't sound like very long. But you count to 30 and add the word “banana” between every number and you will see that it COULD be eternity! It passes by in an eye-blink if you are having fun, but it just never ends if you are miserable!

Apparently, my response to holding a snake for the first time was somewhat expected by my pet store friend. At the end of 30 seconds, I FLUNG the wiggly candy-cane snake into the air and he calmly reached out to catch it before it could hit the floor. “Good man,” I said quietly.

It was apparent that he had “been there and done that”, as the old saying goes.

“I have done enough snake holding for today,” I told my friend. “I will try again next weekend,” I said as I scurried out the door.

I told my students of my attempts to fulfill their wishes for a snake on Monday morning. They did not tell me that they were grateful as I had foolishly expected. They just looked at me like I had let them down for not being able to conquer my snake fears.

Sometimes, middle school students can be brutal.

Word in the teachers’ lounge at my school was that there was a teacher, the band director, that had snakes. Not in his classroom, but at his house. I decided to be friendly and drop by his classroom for a visit.

This teacher was VERY cool and here I had been sharing the same campus with him without ever realizing just how interesting he was. He explained to me that he had a menagerie of 60

snakes at his house, a mixture of pythons and boa constrictors. I quickly checked to see if he had a wedding ring on.

It wasn't that I thought he was handsome or anything, I was just curious if he had found a woman to marry him knowing that he had such a weird hobby. He had. I later found out that while she wasn't happy with a room full of snakes in her home, she felt better about the whole thing when her husband sold a few of them and they had extra money to spend.

I asked him if he had ever worried that one of his snakes would escape and swallow his cat or dog....or maybe his five-year-old son.

"No," he said, "but my wife has brought it up a couple of times." I nodded my head in understanding. She must love him very much, I thought to myself.

The snakes he had were albinos. They were not the normal colors of snakes. He had pink snakes

and yellow snakes and white snakes. He had BIG snakes. They were very unusual snakes, but way too expensive for me! His snakes were sold for around \$1,000 to \$4,000 each.

I told him that I wanted a snake for my classroom that was inexpensive, easy to care for, and didn't wiggle too much. He told me that a ball python was just the snake for me and he knew someone who had a plain brown and beige one that I could buy for \$20.



8

Flying Snake

The kids and I were very excited! The band director had gotten the snake for me and was bringing it to school that very day! It was a baby and was only eight inches long. I had a cage ready and we waited for word that we could come and get the snake.

The entire class walked over to the band hall when he emailed me that the snake was there.

Actually, there was a reason for this. He was planning on sending a student over with the container holding the snake, but I had this dread that I would freak out again as I had done in the pet store and my students would no longer suspect that I was a wimp, they would have proof.

When we got to the band hall, he handed me the container. I opened it up and there was our new pet. It was only a little longer than the pet store snake, but much fatter. It also didn't appear to be wiggly, but I remembered how the candy-cane snake had fooled me. I asked the band director if he wouldn't mind taking out the snake and showing it to my students.

I watched the way he reached in to pick up the snake. He picked it up with one hand and then used the other hand to support its body. The snake did not start to fling itself around and act crazy like the one at the pet store.

I was feeling like I could do this.

I reached out for our baby snake and proudly carried it back to the classroom. We named it Monty. The more I held it, the more natural it felt. The skin was not slimy as I had imagined it might be. It was very soft, smooth, and dry. Best of all, Monty was slow moving so he wouldn't scare the kids who held him.

The next step was feeding him. I had found out that one of the big pet stores sold frozen mice and rats for snake owners. The band director told me that Monty would be able to eat a small mouse.

I went to the pet store and the clerk showed me to the freezer in the very back of the store. They had all different sizes of mice and rats that were frozen in white and green plastic bags. There was a picture of a happy dancing mouse on each bag with an even happier smiling snake. I was thinking that the dead mouse in the bag probably wasn't smiling.

I brought the frozen mouse to school the next day and followed the directions on the bag. First I

let the mouse sit on a desk in the bag until it was no longer frozen. Then the directions told me to put the bag in a bowl of hot water so that it would become warm like a live mouse.

Pythons have small openings around their mouths that sense heat. They will not eat a mouse unless it is warm, which is what a live mouse would feel like. A snake in the wild will not eat a dead animal because it might have died of a disease and could make the snake sick and possibly die if he ate it.

My students were watching as I followed the directions on the mouse package. We were all curious to see how Monty was going to swallow a mouse that was bigger than his head. We had found out from a book that there was a small hole underneath a snake's tongue that allowed him to breathe as he was swallowing the mouse.

My job was to convince Monty that the mouse was alive. The students gathered around

Monty's cage and watched as I opened the bag with the heated-up mouse. The mouse was small with a tiny tail, maybe as long as half of your thumb. I picked up the warm, dead mouse by the tail and dangled it in front of Monty.

Monty's tongue darted in and out, smelling the mouse. He lifted his head and neck towards the dancing mouse. I made the mouse swing and bounce and got it closer to Monty's head. The kids were silent in expectation, moving in as close to the cage as they could.



That is when Monty FLEW from the floor of the cage, through the air, missed the mouse-target, and bit one of my fingers that held onto the mouse's tail. It felt like tiny needles going into my finger and I dropped the mouse, pulled up my hand with Monty still hanging onto the finger, and FLUNG him off! He soared across the room and landed on a red beanbag.

The good news was that Monty landed on something soft. The bad news was that I yelled something that the principal would absolutely NOT approve of. The best news was that the kids didn't hear me because they were screaming from surprise at Monty's unexpected jump towards the mouse and then his flight across the classroom.

I looked at my poor finger. I realized that I probably should have held the mouse's tail with tongs or pliers...anything but my fingers. I was surprised at how much it hurt!

That incident had reminded me that I had told our principal that I was going to have parents sign a permission slip before their kid could hold the snake. Even though Monty accidentally bit my finger, I was reminded of what my pet-store friend had said, “Any animal COULD bite, but they probably won’t.”

As my Jewish husband would say, “Oy, Vey!”



9

The Permission Slip

The kids wanted to take turns holding the new classroom pet. “No, not until your parents sign the permission slip,” I said.

“You never gave us a permission slip, Mrs. Fraifeld,” they pointed out.

“That is only because I have not made one yet!” I said. “We need to create one that your parents will feel good about signing,” I wisely said.

The homework assignment for the students was to draw the cutest, most endearing-looking baby python ever. I told them to leave out any hint of fangs, because even though we all found out that he had them due to the unfortunate feeding incident; it would not be a good idea to openly share that with whomever you wanted to sign the permission slip.

“We must make him look adorable with a very sweet face,” I told my enlightened students. “I will take the best drawing and I will add a baby-bonnet to put on his head,” I told them.

I looked at all of my students seriously and said, “Whatever you do, don’t mention to your folks that he is going to get a little bit bigger.”

“What if they ask?” a student said.

“Well, if they ask, then tell them. But they may not ask!” I added.

I thought about this a bit longer and said, “And let’s refer to him as Monty-the-Snake, not Monty-the-Python.” Snake doesn’t sound particularly good, but “python” sounds scary.

It had not been much earlier in the year when a picture of a python had appeared on the Internet. It had been trying to eat an alligator in the Florida everglades. The caption went something like:

**Big, Hungry Python Tries To Eat Big,
Mean Alligator Until Alligator Decides
It Doesn’t Want To Be Eaten!**

Everyone was talking about the story. It seemed that people would get baby burmese pythons that, when full grown, would reach 20 to 25 feet long. While they might have thought it looked cool to carry it around when it was five to eight feet

long, it no longer seemed cool when it was eyeing their dog or the neighborhood kids when it got hungry. In a panic, these people would turn these animals loose in the wild to fend for themselves. This was not good news to wildlife, pets, or unaware hikers.

I did not want any of the parents to think I had one of THOSE pythons! We had a ball python and it would stay less than five feet long when full-grown and would be happy to eat the rats that I got at the pet store.

“I am going to make my snake wrapped around a baby rattle!” one of my students said.

“Mine is going to be singing multiplication songs with us,” another student added.

“Yep,” I said, “you have the right idea!”

The next day brought many creative drawings for the permission slip. Only one of the students didn't follow instructions. He drew a huge, big-fanged, man-eating snake. The poor hapless person

being strangled before being swallowed had eyes bulging out of his head. His cartoon hand was sticking out of the snake coils and there was blood squirting out of the fingers.



I looked at it for a moment and said, “I get the snake strangling the guy, but what’s with the bloody hand?” I said, pointing to the red puddle he drew in the picture. My student was smiling a big, evil grin. “That is where we can tell our parents that the snake bit him when he was just a baby like Monty.”

I had to laugh at the creativity of this kid!

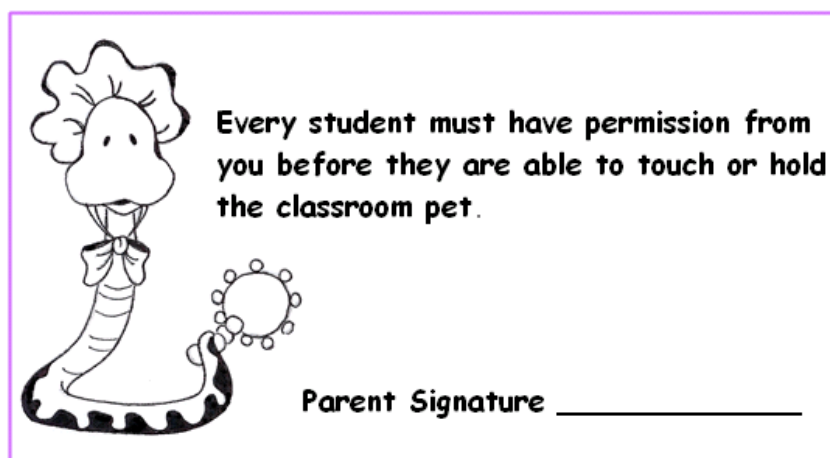
I looked at this picture of destruction and impending death and tried to visualize what this killer snake would look like with a baby bonnet and bib on it.....maybe a teddy bear laying next to the death scene. I held it up and asked the class, “Now REALLY.....would your parents sign a permission slip with a picture of a snake like this on it?” The boys in the class laughed and imitated the strangled cartoon drawing.

I had to laugh to myself as I had my own vision of a huge smiling Monty coiled around a chair in the corner of the classroom with a sign posted above it that said “Time Out Chair”. I could send a notice home with each student saying that this was a proven method of improving poor behavior in the classroom. If the behavior didn’t improve, Monty would get rid of it altogether.

I chuckled quietly to myself.



We decided on the picture that we liked the best. We chose the one that we felt parents would be willing to sign. By the end of the day I had a very sweet permission slip for the kids to take home.



“Now,” I explained as I was handing out the slips the next day, “if your parent does not sign this permission slip, you can’t touch or hold the snake.” I then added, “I have all of your parents’ signatures from the papers they filled out at the beginning of the year, so don’t try to forge it!”

I noticed several of the kids faces fall when I said this. I wasn't worried, however. I was pretty sure that my students would nag their parents until they agreed. As I said earlier, middle school kids can be BRUTAL.

10



Monty's Fieldtrip

The school year passed and Monty grew from a little snake to a two-and-a-half foot snake. We watched him eat little mice, then big mice, then small rats, all dangled in front of him with egg tongs, not fingers.

It was amazing to see him swallow something much, much larger than his head and even more

amazing to look at the big bump in his belly that we knew had been a small rat just a few minutes before.

Other than that first time that I stupidly held a tiny mouse by the tail and had my fingers mistaken for a meal, Monty had never bitten anyone. He was happy to be handled by the students and enjoyed exploring their hair, ears, hands and necks.

My students would beg to wear him around their necks to run errands for me. I assured them that I was not going to allow for a mob to surround them while they were carrying Monty in the hallways. If there was a possibility that the mob would be a quiet, courteous, and respectful mob, then I would have no problem. But it seemed that everyone had their own unique reaction to snakes, sometimes quite loud, and I wanted to try to fly under the radar with Monty. The less attention he got, the better.

However, it did happen once, but it was an accident. A student of mine made a perfect score on

a test and I sent her off to the 100-Club to claim a prize. I had long since quit noticing who was holding Monty. As long as the students were able to do their math with the snake, I left them and Monty alone.

As my student ran excitedly out the door with her test paper, my other students told me that she had forgotten to take Monty off of her neck. This was not good news. A little 6th grade girl was loose in the middle school halls with a large snake dangling from her neck. I tried to act casual in front of the class, but I was feeling nervous.

For one thing, I was sure the principal still imagined Monty as a tiny snake. The few times he had come to my classroom, it was to either speak to me briefly or one of the students, not noticing anything in the room.

If a commotion happened, and it WOULD if the bell rang when my student was in the halls, it would be rather obvious that Monty was growing

into a rather large serpent. He no longer could pass for the tiny snake that we drew on the permission slip that the parents signed at the beginning of the year.

It would also be difficult to break up the crowd that would form around my student and her living necklace.

Just as I feared, the bell rang and there was no sign of my student. I shot out the door ahead of the other kids to see her running towards my classroom.

Monty's neck extended a foot in the air above her head, bobbing up and down as she ran, checking out the new smells with his tongue. I heard some screams from students as they noticed the snake. Some of the kids were starting to circle her. Others had turned around and started to run the opposite direction.

I reached her just before another teacher came out of her classroom to investigate the disturbance. I grabbed my student's hand, pulled her through the

gathering kids, and started to unwind Monty off her neck as we darted back to the classroom.

Monty looked disappointed at not being able to investigate all the new sights on his big adventure. My student was laughing and said, “I wish you would have had your camera, Mrs. Fraifeld! It would have been a great yearbook picture!”

Monty no longer went unnoticed on the campus. After his outing on my student’s neck, news traveled quickly and Monty rose to fame in just a few short days. I had students dropping by the classroom on their way home and heads popping in the door between classes to take a quick look around the room trying to see him.

That was how I came to be talked in to bringing him to a math class that I was teaching for a teacher that was ill for a day. I walked into the class and instructed the students to get out their dry erase boards so that we could do a warm-up. A boy

who sat up front said, “Aren’t you the teacher who has the animals?”

“Yes, I do have some pets in my classroom,” I answered.

Several of the students realized at that time that the snake that everyone had been talking about a few weeks ago belonged to me.

They begged for me to go and get Monty.

“I will get him,” I said, “But you will not be allowed to hold him because you do not have a signed permission slip from your parents.”

Though there was disappointment at this news, they still wanted to see and touch the snake. I agreed to get Monty, but explained to them that we had to do the lesson that the teacher had left for them, so they only had a short time to check the snake out before getting to work.

Monty was excited about getting out of the classroom and seeing new sights. He was stretching himself out so that he could get as close to the kids

as possible. I let the kids touch him and feel how smooth his skin was.

When I felt they had spent enough time asking questions and touching the snake, I started the lesson. I draped Monty around my neck like a scarf and focused on getting the kids to get busy on their math.

At first, Monty had their full attention as he slithered around my neck and then raised the top half of his body up over my head to get a better look around, his tongue darting in and out so that he could smell everything around him.

I knew that Monty could hang on, so I blocked him out of my mind in order to focus on the lesson. I was writing math problems on the board and the kids were solving them and then raising their dry erase boards in the air to show me their answers. All the while, Monty was circling my neck, then my arm, and part of him was dangling around my waist.



11 nakeskin Belt

It was difficult to ignore Monty as I was teaching. I realized that when I told kids in my class that they had to be able to not pay attention to him while they were doing their work, it must have taken a great deal of effort! It was hard for me to ignore Monty as he traveled from my neck to my arms to my head and then down towards my waist.

I knew Monty could hang on, so I fought the urge to reach for him and try to support his body. I just focused on the lesson.

I felt Monty checking out my pant's pocket. I kept teaching. I felt Monty on the other side of my waist and he felt like he was entering the other

pocket as well. I felt like I was wearing a western belt.

Then a student raised their hand and said, “Mrs. Fraifeld,’ he said a bit panicky, “I think Monty is stuck in your pants belt loop!”

My hand reached down to feel my belt loops that were next to my pockets. I felt Monty’s head in the left pocket, but the belt loops were empty. I felt the front of my pants. No snake in those loops either, but I felt his tail to the right of my zipper. I laughed and said, “Yeah! He wants to be a snakeskin belt!”

“NO!” they hollered. “The snake is STUCK in your belt loop in the back of your pants!”

Oh surely not. I couldn’t believe what I was feeling. My hands were reaching around behind me and trying to see if I completely understood what the kids were saying Monty had done.

Wedged tighter than I thought possible, was Monty, half his body extending on either side of the

belt loop. He was so tight in that loop that cutting the loop to free him was not possible without hurting him. My mind was dazed at the idea that he had done that without me having a clue when I was teaching.



I tried to gently coax him to work his way through the loop. I pulled him from the front end while pushing him gently from the other. The kids were helping by talking excitedly and crowding around my backside.

It didn't take a genius to figure out what these kids were going to be talking about around the dinner table that night. And there was NO math going on in that room.

Here I was, doing so great at keeping the snake out of the lime light, and now he was stuck in my pants without a hint of me being able to get him out without serious intervention!

I had to get to the office and call the band director. HE would know what to do! I found a teacher who was off that period and asked her to take the class. When she saw Monty's head sticking out to the side of me trying to get a good view of what was in front of me, and his tail extending

around the other side, she agreed to help me out, as long as I stayed away from her.

I had precious few minutes to get to the office before the bell rang. I grabbed Monty's head with one hand and his tail with another and RAN.

I made it to the office door with a few seconds to spare before the bell rang. The secretary stopped her typing and looked up at me.

"Something I can do for you, Mrs. Fraifeld?" she said. Then she saw Monty and looked back up at me. "Or perhaps something I could do for the snake you seem to be wearing as a belt?"

"I need your help!" I said nervously. I seem to have accidentally let my pet snake get stuck in my back belt loop while I was teaching and I can't get him out!"

She looked at me without any expression on her face. "Yes, of course I can see that. Is there something you would like me to do about this

....situation....you seem to have gotten yourself into?”

“I really need for you to see if the band director can come and offer some advice or help,” I said. I was becoming very concerned that coming to the office was not the best move to make if I wanted to look like a competent teacher with classroom pets. Right now, there was only myself, Monty, and the school secretary; however, that scenario could change in a flash when the bell rang.

“No problem, Mrs. Fraifeld,” she calmly said. “I will see if the band director can come to rescue you from this....problem.”

It was about that time when I heard the click of a camera phone. Monty was no longer hanging on to my waist. He was stretching his front body out as far as he could to try to investigate the office. He probably was smelling bad kids who get sent there for misbehaving in class.

I turned around in time to see one of the counselors looking at their cell phone picture. Then I saw the light from a camera flash as one of the assistant principals who had just walked in decided this sight was worth capturing.

The secretary still looked totally calm and cool. I couldn't help but wonder to myself what she must see in the office every day to not be at all surprised with a python caught in a teacher's belt loop. I decided that I was glad that I did not work in the office!

The band director was there in about five minutes. He pulled up a chair and started to work at getting Monty free from the loop. It took almost 15 minutes to work him through the loop, and Monty left a long, unbroken string of dead skin behind him as he squeezed his way out of the loop.

By the time that I got back to my classroom, I had the pictures that had been taken in the office already sent to my email address. I sent them to a

one hour processing store and had the picture with
Monty's shed skin in my classroom photo album.

12



Squirrel King and the New Permission Slip

By the following school year, Monty was bigger still. He had grown fatter over the summer and had started to eat medium sized rats. I was sure that my new students would be delighted, but not at

first. It might take a few weeks for them to feel lucky that they had such a cool classroom pet.

I knew from the past that all it took was one animal-lover in a class to get everyone comfortable with the pets. It took someone who either had held a snake or was just plain brave. That someone walked into my classroom with his mom and younger brothers during 6th grade orientation.

School was going to start for the kids in two days. The teachers were already in their rooms getting ready for the first day. Parents and their 6th graders were wandering around the campus.

Sixth graders get very nervous about middle school. They are used to elementary school where a teacher takes them everywhere they need to go and they all line up like a choo-choo train and follow him or her. Middle school can be scary because it is much bigger than an elementary school and the kids have to get to their classes by themselves, ON TIME. This is exciting to the kids, but they are also

aware that they have never had to worry about being late before. Their teachers always took care of that when they were younger.

Now they roamed around the big campus with their parents trying to figure out where their classes were and where their locker was going to be and where the bathrooms were.

I teach all of the grade levels at middle school, and I knew that NOBODY worried like a brand new 6th grader! And if the kid is worried, then so is their family!

So in walked my future student with his mom and brothers. The brothers, who were younger, ran towards the castle and dragon and knights in the back of the classroom. My student was immediately drawn to the animals and I made myself comfortable talking to his mom.

My new student walked over to Monty's cage and asked if he could hold him. I said, "Absolutely, if it is ok with your mother."

His mother looked at the large snake hesitantly. I quickly added that Monty had been held by students since he was smaller than a ruler and was a great classroom pet. She agreed, but she chose to sit away from her son while he held the snake.

My student was standing behind me as I was talking to his mom. I spoke with her about how I taught the multiplication and division facts through singing.

“Does Monty bite?” her son interrupted.

“No,” I answered, keeping my attention focused on his mother.

I proceeded to explain to her how my class would learn how to read and interpret graphs by weighing the turtles every week and graphing the results.

“Wow. Is the snake poisonous?” my future student interrupted me again.

As a parent, I was used to being interrupted and even ignored by my children, but as a teacher, I did not appreciate it.

Sighing I said, “No, I would not have an animal that could kill you in the classroom. And if I did, I would only let you hold it if you were VERY bad,” I said. “And you should not interrupt adults when they are talking!”

I had been speaking to him but never looking at him. Every time he interrupted us, I would stop talking, hang my head back as if I were talking to the ceiling, and I would answer him.

Once again I started to talk to his mom about how all of the 6th graders were nervous about the first day of school and how the teachers would be out in the halls for the first week helping them find their way.

“So, Monty has NEVER bitten anyone, and he isn’t poisonous, and there are teeth in his mouth? Can I open his mouth?” he interrupted.

This was not good. I had a future student who had ignored my directive of not interrupting. I finally turned around to face him so I could give him my stern teacher-face. To my complete amazement, my future student was intently picking at Monty's eye!

"What are you DOING?" I half-yelled as I immediately took Monty away from him. "Of COURSE he will bite you if you try to pick his eye out!!!"

"But his eye looks like a B-B," he explained, reaching to take the snake back from me.

"What kind of squirrel-bait holds a big snake and pokes at his eyes?" I sputtered.

He looked at his mother who calmly answered the question that was on his mind but not yet out of his mouth, "She called you a nut, son. Squirrels eat nuts, so that is the bait you would use to catch them."

She looked exhausted. She looked around at her three children and said, “I am SO ready for these kids to go back to school. Just two more days.”

“Can I hold the snake in class if I promise not to pick at its eyes?” her son asked me.

I looked at his mother and then I looked at the kid. “Sure. But don’t go picking at his skin or nose or anything else, got it?”

He agreed as his mother rounded up her children and went to search for the next class on the list. I just flopped back in the chair and shook my head.

This new student, so close to being strangled by his future math teacher just before being bitten by the python whose eye he was trying to remove, became one of my favorite students that year. I fondly called him Squirrel King. The class and I even made him a crown with acorns glued on it and draped a towel around his shoulders for his kingly robe.

Squirrel King made me laugh and brought a huge smile to my face every single day that he walked into my classroom. He also made me realize that a new permission slip must be created as soon as possible before any of my students could hold the animals.

No cute snake pictures with a baby bonnet. Monty was almost four feet long. He was almost as large as he was going to get, which is good if you are trying to convince a parent that the chances of her child getting swallowed by him were slim.

I found a picture of a python on the internet that was hanging down from a stick. It didn't look too scary, but it was much more honest than the baby-bonnet-clad snake from the previous year. I still didn't call him a snake. I said we had "reptiles" and they couldn't be handled by the students without parental consent. I added five dancing turtles at the bottom to help lighten the permission slip up and make it easier to agree to.

I waited for two weeks before sending the permission slip home with the kids. I waited long enough for the kids to really WANT to hold that snake. I had permission from Squirrel-King's mom for him to handle the snake, so I used him to get the kids to want to try it, too.

Before he was allowed to touch the snake again, however, we had a private conversation on the craziness of doing anything to an animal that you wouldn't want done to yourself....unless you wanted to find out how far Monty's fangs could go in your hand.

Squirrel-King was a quick learner!



Ditto

Monty, the great escape artist snake and the ultimate class entertainer was the perfect classroom pet. Who knew? But it wasn't an easy journey from here to there. Finding the exact right pet for a middle school classroom was an adventure all its own! We now have a new addition to our classroom. We have a female ball python named Ditto. I can only imagine what new adventures she will take us on!

What I DO know is I hope that all of my old students will keep coming back to my classroom to find out! Squirrel King went on to become a football player in high school. And to be sure, I

never remember him interrupting me again after our first meeting. He was one of the best animal handlers I have ever had and managed to get every new student to be brave enough to handle Monty.

When I see some of my old students in the halls or at the high school or even on their first jobs, they may not remember much about me, but they sure remember the animals that shared their math class when they were in middle school!

