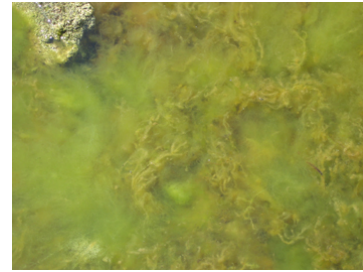


From the Kitchen

2 December 2009

Kevin was concerned. No, he was more than concerned – he was panicking. He was the school captain but he didn't feel he was really in charge. It was unfair, he thought, that everyone expected him and the Student Representative Council to fix all the problems.



The schoolyard was smelly. The stink had been around for a while, but it was getting steadily worse. It was starting to become unbearable.

Kevin had desperately wanted the job of school captain. At the school assembly he had actually stood up and bounced on the spot, chanting, "Pick me, pick me!" He was captain of Red House. John, the captain of Blue House, had been school captain for years; in fact, he'd repeated year twelve over and over, so that he could remain school captain. John even told lies to stay there.

Kevin had told everyone that he and his friends would fix the stench in the schoolyard. Now he wasn't so sure.

It was very clear where the smells came from – garbage all over the schoolyard. Most of the students just dropped their rubbish anywhere. Some even failed to use the toilets and just peed and pooped in the bushes at the edge of the grounds – these were also the school bullies and drug dealers. They frightened Kevin. They threatened to dig up the sports fields if they were forced to use the toilets and the bins. These were the students who threw away their lunchboxes every day, instead of taking them home to be washed and reused.

Kevin asked his friend Ross to help him work out what to do. Ross was a mathematics whizz-kid. He calculated how much rubbish was lying around the school and how much of it could be cleaned up while Kevin was school captain.

Everyone expected Ross to say that, if they all pitched in, it could be half cleaned up by the end of the year. But the bullies got to Ross and he told Kevin that they should aim at cleaning up five percent and that they should simply convince students to stop dropping so much rubbish. Bob, the Green House captain, said that the bullies should be *forced* to use the bins and the toilets. Bob was particularly concerned that the filth from the high school was spilling into the neighbouring primary schools. Kevin also had to deal with some students, like Steve, who believed that no-one was to blame for the state of the yard – Steve believed it just happened spontaneously.

Kevin got Penny to put a plan together. There was going to be a meeting of all high school captains to discuss what should be done with the rubbish problems that were now affecting every school. Penny suggested they have yard monitors to stop students dropping things but that, because the bullies couldn't be controlled, everyone else would have to make a bigger effort. She suggested that everyone (except the bullies) who was caught littering would have to pay fifty cents into a big pot. Half of this money could be used to pay someone to clean up the yard and the other half could be paid to the bullies so that they would allow Kevin to implement the plan. Penny worked out, however, that it would probably take more than ten years before the schoolyard would start to be noticeably cleaner. The students from the primary schools complained that, before then, the little kids would all be drowning in garbage.

Andrew, who edited the school's weekly newsletter (*Coming of Age*) was in Yellow House and wanted to get the yard cleaned up quickly. However, he couldn't afford to upset the bullies too much because they often paid for his lunches. He filled most of the newsletter with stories and photos of the school's sports jocks and the student romances that came and went more frequently than the school bus. Most of the stories he wrote about the rubbish were about how students would suffer if Kevin forced things to change too quickly.

Malcolm, the Blue House captain, kept changing his mind about supporting Kevin and the Blue House students kicked him out and made Tony the captain. Unfortunately, Tony adopted a wait-and-see approach.

At the school captains' meeting there was lots of arguing. It was clear that every school had a garbage problem and something needed to be done. Every school also had bully problems and no-one wanted to upset those powerful students. In the end they decided that litterers (except bullies) should pay a *dollar* each time they were caught and that the extra money should be used to dig deep holes to put the rubbish in and that the bullies' excrement should be hosed into the nearest creeks and rivers so that it would, hopefully, disappear in to the virtually infinite sea.

If things became too bad for them, the primary school children could migrate onto the secondary campuses.