

THE SNOOPERVISOR

BY JEFFREY GLANZ

When I first met my new supervisor, Hal Gruber, he seemed pleasant enough. But he quickly took the role of taskmaster, drill sergeant, and overseer—as our next meeting, a week later, demonstrated.

I was leading my 5th graders to lunch. All the other teachers were doing the same with their classes. Chaos reigned.

Suddenly, Gruber's towering figure appeared in the hall. He shouted, "Glanz! Can't you get your kids to shut up and stand in line? Don't you know anything about discipline?"

I felt humiliated and angry. Whatever discipline I had established with my class disappeared instantly.

Homework

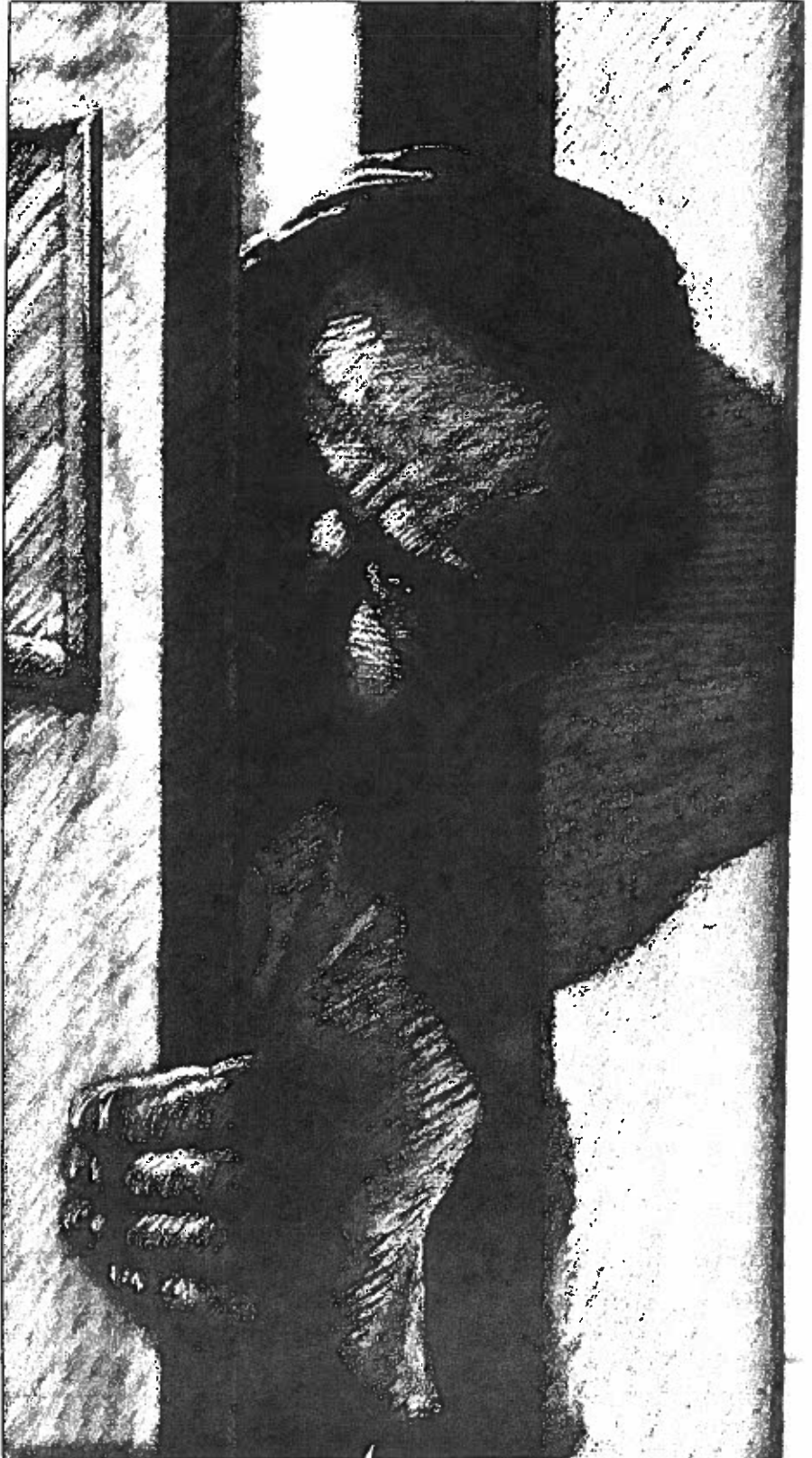
Shortly after that, Gruber announced the new school policy concerning homework. "You will give homework every day," he instructed us. "Case closed."

I felt strongly that homework should flow from the lesson. If the lesson doesn't call for it, there's no reason to give it. Apparently, though, Gruber didn't care whether the assignments had any basis in our lessons.

The staff was divided in its opinion of Gruber. Originally a math specialist, he'd made several dynamic presentations in math classes. Consequently, the math teachers thought highly of him. On the other hand, teachers who'd had confrontations similar to mine agreed the situation was bad. No one knew what to do.

Another run-in

One day my class and I were engaged in a lesson on similes. Everyone was attentive as I began writing on the board. Then two boys asked permission to sharpen their pencils. I nodded.



Suddenly, Gruber burst through the door and began inspecting the room. He jotted down some information, then exploded.

"Mr. Glanz, don't you know the Board of Education regulation about windows? Your window is open 7 inches! That's an inch and a half more than allowed.

"Why are those boys out of their seats?"

"Why isn't the objective on the board? Not much of a lesson, I see!"

The man was obviously in a hurry, but he didn't even give me 3 seconds to explain.

After the supervisor left, Jenny peeked up at me. "Mr. Glanz," she asked, "are you going to lose your job?"

A better way

Two things really bugged me: first, that Gruber had criticized me in front of the class, and second, that he'd jumped to false conclusions about what was going on in my room.

We had opened the windows too far, but this certainly didn't require immediate attention. The boys weren't creating a disturbance. And I hadn't written the objective on the board because we were just about to discuss objectives.

Gruber apparently thought that being continuously seated was a prerequisite for learning, and that having the objective on the board would somehow ensure that learning was taking place.

He seemed so cold and unfeeling. Surely he could have noted the inflections in a more courteous and professional way—in private. I felt undermined and harassed.

I acknowledge the importance of a supervisor. But such insensitive and unprofessional supervision frus-

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BOB PHILLIPS

trated me. I didn't appreciate a snoopervisor.

The solution

Shortly after this incident, I attended a workshop on becoming more sensitive to students' feelings. The role-playing exercises made me think about my relationship with Gruber. Perhaps I hadn't been sensitive to his feelings. What were *his* daily problems? What pressure did *his* supervisor apply to him? I didn't know.

I decided to try to get to know him. Maybe then I could break down the

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But they
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barriers that kept us at cross-purposes. When I confided my plan to Bill, a colleague, he thought it was hopeless. But I was determined to try. I'd been teaching for 16 years, and I wasn't ready to give up on a job I thoroughly enjoyed. The next day, I stopped by Gruber's office.

"Are you busy?"

"How can I help?" he responded.

"Our relationship has been deteriorating," I began. "We both have at least 15 years until retirement. We can't continue this way for that long!"

He chuckled and nodded.

"Wouldn't it make sense for us to begin talking as colleagues?" I continued.

The telephone interrupted us. Obviously the irate parent on the other end of the line wouldn't let Gruber complete a sentence. The supervisor caught my eye and gave me a smile accompanied by a shrug.

"Parents seem to vent the anger and frustration of their own teenage years on me when they call," he ex-

plained after the conversation ended. That was only the first of constant interruptions to our talk.

As we continued, I learned how much pressure he was under from the principal and the district office.

They demanded he check windows. "The lawyers are afraid some kid will jump and we'll be sued," he explained.

They insisted every teacher write the lesson's objective on the blackboard. "They think it would look good if some big shot walked in," he sighed.


Assigning homework every day was *their* idea, too. "That goes against everything I learned in college and grad school," he said, shaking his head.

Gruber also told me he wished he could return to teaching. Economics and the embarrassment of taking a "demotion" kept him in administration. I sympathized.

Needless to say, I began to see Gruber in a new light. He certainly had problems, too. During our chat, he had to deal with an angry parent, three unmanageable students, and an overbearing textbook representative. On parting, Gruber remarked, "Let's get together again soon."

No more snoopervisor

The change in his behavior after that amazed me. He never again criticized me in front of my students or undermined my authority in the classroom in any way. Of course, he still blew up in certain situations, but I learned that this was the way he handled stress. My getting to know him had changed us both.

Regular chats transformed our relationship from one beset by anger and frustration to one of collegiality and congeniality. In fact, on the last day of school, he suggested we go to a boxing match together that weekend. I accepted with surprise—and pleasure. 

Jeffrey Glanz has been teaching for 20 years. He currently teaches computer science to 7th and 8th graders in Brooklyn, N.Y.