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Being an author is more a state of mind than a job. Curiosity is a reflex – eyes and ears constantly alert, unconsciously collecting raw material. For me, each day is a procession of ideas, maybe that's why I have spent the last 30 years in schools; there's a new tale around every corner. Overheard candid staffroom gossip, a child's innocent insightfulness or, as happened a few months ago, an event that could only happen in a school...

Walking wounded

On my way to grab a quick tea before setting up for my afternoon session I edged past that lunchtime's queue of

wounded children outside the first-aid room. The door was open and inside was a particularly distressed girl being comforted by a T.A. "It's going to take more than a magic plaster and TLC to stem those sobs," I thought. It was only after school that I heard the full horror of the story...

As this child was sitting in the 'quiet area' next to the nursery she noticed Tracy, one of the teachers, crouching down and scraping around at the foot of the large oak tree with a trowel. After a while Tracy, unaware she was being observed, found what she was looking for, held it up by its tail, casually wiped the dirt from its fur, stood up and coolly carried it into the classroom. It was being witness to this disinterment that had caused such shock and this is the story behind it...

Goldie, the class hamster had died overnight. At four, she had had a good life, for which the assembled nursery children expressed their gratitude

at the impromptu funeral. "Thank you, Goldie, for letting us stroke you; for letting us feed you; for being so cute and nice; we will miss you." Once the condolences had dried up, and the grieving process was complete, it was back to the sand and the modelling clay. It was only at the end of the morning that the thought struck Tracy – "Oh no! The afternoon children, they haven't said goodbye

to Goldie... we'll have to bury her again!" How was she to know that the deed was going to be overlooked by an innocent bystander?



Endangered species

Apart from the obligatory fish tank in the foyer, allergies and Health & Safety seem to have made school pets an endangered species. This is a shame as they are always a great source of funny stories.

In one school, while scanning the rows of mugshot photos at reception to find the face of the literacy coordinator who invited me in, I saw 'Brandon', the school cat, proudly staring out amongst the governors and dinner ladies. Classic! And I'll never forget overhearing a teacher admitting, to protect the sensitivities of her class, over the years she had secretly 'replaced' a guinea pig three times and was surprised that nobody was curious as to why Snowy was now nearly fifteen... although I bet somewhere in the school grounds there is a row of tiny headstones – I just hope it's nowhere near the quiet area!

alas poor Goldie...



Antony Lishak taught in primary schools for more than 15 years before becoming a full-time children's author. He lives in Hertfordshire with his wife and three children. To find out more about his work in schools, visit his website at www.antonylishak.com or email antony@lishak.com.