

## **Experience Helps!**

*Lloyd Robinson, Associate Superintendent, British Columbia Conference, Abbotsford, BC*

This year we had a houseguest for the Christmas holidays. He is a retired public school teacher that I worked with many years ago. We have maintained our friendship ever since those days in the Peel Board. During his visit, I pulled out some pictures of staff and students with whom we had worked. The pictures brought back memories, some good, and some bad.



As we looked at the old pictures and talked about what has happened since those days, I was struck with one thought, and that was that I've been around for a long time! Somehow I've become a senior educator, even though it seems like just yesterday that I was the new kid beginning my career at College Park Elementary in Oshawa.

I officially began my teaching career on January 1. Because I had to do my student teaching in Oregon during the Fall quarter, I felt fortunate over the Christmas break to be offered a grade five position in my hometown.

It didn't take me long to learn my class had already worn out one teacher. I was the third teacher of the year hired to work with that group of students. Needless to say, the challenge was great, and I had my hands full. All new teachers have much to learn and I was very fortunate to have a fantastic group of veteran teachers willing and able to guide me along. Violet Prouty, Christine Phillips, and Alvena Dunhill spent many hours answering questions and helping me learn some of the "insider" tricks for dealing with the difficult class. One of the best things they taught me was the ability to laugh at things, and not take everything that happened too seriously.

Recently, I came across a newspaper article based on a study prepared by three teachers' groups in Ontario. The study found that 50% of teachers in Ontario's public and Roman Catholic schools have been bullied either by parents, their superiors, or colleagues at some point in their career. An earlier study found that 38% of teachers in the province have been bullied by a student.

Bullying was defined as repeated incidents of abuse, threats, insults or humiliation. It also consisted of persistent or unfair criticism and trivial faultfinding or attempts to isolate the teacher.

As I read the article, I couldn't help but speculate on what the statistics might show if we conducted a similar survey of teachers in our Adventist schools. I suspect the results would be similar.

In my first year of teaching, I had a parent who was notorious for her unreasonable demands. One day she screamed and yelled at me in full view of other teachers and

students. Thanks to the rapport we had on staff, I was able to view the incident for what it was, and not take the attack personally.

Teaching is not an easy profession. I've worked with many colleagues over the years who stayed around for two or three years and then moved on to something they thought would be less stressful. I believe that the first few years in teaching are critical. Having the right kind of support system or mentor is a huge advantage.

In the British Columbia Conference, we are working to improve official mentoring for our new teachers. This is especially important for teachers in smaller schools. Regardless of official policy, it remains the responsibility of individual teachers to do what they can to help themselves and become the best they can be. This often involves working with and listening to those with more experience.