



NOVEMBER 7TH, 2014

TURTLE TRACKS

A WEEKLY EMAIL NEWSLETTER FOR THE VERMONT COMMONS SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Upcoming
Events

November 7th-9th
Brown University
Model UN

November 8th
SATs

November 8th
Volleyball State Champ.
at Johnson State College

November 12th
VCS Closed
for Students

Grandparents' Day!



VCS Literati Present the Winners of the Halloween Writing Contest

STUDENT WINNER BEN MAKSYM, VCS '16

The first time it happened it hardly seemed worthy of note. I had been walking down the street, minding my own business, when I heard footsteps behind me. It wasn't unusual; the street was public, after all. But when I looked behind me, nobody was there. Perplexed, I turned away and continued marching home, but the footsteps persisted.

Day after day they followed me down that desolate street, each day going a bit farther towards my home. Finally, one day, the noise followed me right to my front porch. I whirled on my heel, determined to spot whatever brat had followed me for months, but as usual, there was naught but pebbles and concrete.

That night, I lay in my bed, slowly drifting off to sleep. As my eyes closed, I suddenly became aware of a distant thumping; footsteps on my stairs. My door creaked open, but nothing was there.

As I calmed myself, I heard one word, rasped in a throaty croak, directly in my ear.
"Surprise..."



FACULTY WINNER STEVE LAUSIER

The first time it happened, it hardly seemed worthy of note. A kind, if difficult professor emeritus making the simplest of requests to the IT department. It was just my own bad luck that the ambivalent rotation of calls would always land her, like a loaded roulette ball, on me.

Like any other member of that dreaded caste of clients known as the "Professors Emeriti," I took note of her strengths and weaknesses -- most notably that she excelled at listening and following direction, but was deficient at interpreting even the simplest of tech lingo. Still, seven years in IT has a tendency to strengthen one's affinity for patience, in a way seven years of prison has a tendency to strengthen one's grip on bath soap.

But people have a thing for surprising you -- especially if you're on the business end of an IT helpline.

The issue seemed simple, if marginally dangerous. The kindly old emeritus was trying to edit a grant application she was writing for one of UVM's largest departments -- a document that was over 300 pages long, and which she had almost certainly spent months upon months writing. The problem was the document wouldn't allow her to make any edits, and she had a few t's to cross and i's to dot before sending it to whatever powers-that-be who poured over the lowly monetary requests of retired scholars.

My immediate assumption -- which I still maintain was the most logical conclusion to make -- was that somehow the document had been saved as "read-only," a function which would allow her to open the grant like any other file, but would not give her permission to make edits.

Fully aware of who I was dealing with, I entered the headache-inducing realm of trying to explain how

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to “Save As” a document into something other than “read-only” mode. I’ll admit, after the first *half an hour* on the phone, I was starting to get just a little bit frustrated. It was a Friday, after all, and I had better things to do.

What should have been a 30-second call slowly built to a 45-minute exploration of almost every single one of Microsoft Word’s functions *other than* the “Save As” command. Finally, my exasperating client decided she needed to take a moment to “relieve” herself, as she put it, and the timer on my phone passed the 1-hour mark while I waited for her to return.

While she was gone, I made every effort to bash my own skull in on the brick wall of my office. As the gray matter of my brain was cast to and fro like confetti in a snow globe, I made the conscious decision that there were too many fundamentals missing on the opposite end of the telephone line to keep going down this path. I decided to get creative.

When she returned, I’d recovered a sliver of enthusiasm. I decided to try teaching her a few hotkey commands -- nothing more than copying and pasting. If I could get her to copy the text of the grant onto a new document, she would be able to tweak the new file however she wanted.

First step. “Alright, open up a new Word document.”

Success!

Second step. “Okay,” I said, “now go back to your grant, and click anywhere on the document.”

Also success!

Third step, “Alright, now hit Ctrl + A.” Translation: *Select All*.

Not so much success. “Nothing seems to be happening,” she said with a twinge of self-aware guilt.

“Hmmm,” I murmured, as if I actually had to ask myself what the root cause of this error was. It’s almost disturbing how consistently cheerful I can make myself sound over the phone. Again, seven years in IT and all that jazz.

“I pressed Ctrl and A, just like you said,” the old emeritus whimpered into the phone.

“Did you press them at the same time, or separately?” I asked, again with the same falsely cheerful tone.

“Separately,” she said. Of bloody course.

“Okay, try pressing them together this time.”

Still no luck.

“Which did you hit first, the Ctrl or the A key?” Take a wild guess what order it was in.

“Alright, this time try holding down the Ctrl button, then press A.”

She gasped in surprise, “All the text just turned blue!”

In my mind, I was thinking *Finally...we’re connecting*.

“Alright, great!” I said to her, with slightly less falsified enthusiasm. “Now just right-click on the document.”

Here’s where things skimmed the event horizon.

With the same whimpering stutter, the emeritus murmured into the phone, “Well, now all of the text is gone. It’s just a blank page with the word *click* at the top.”

At first, I didn’t understand what in the seven hells she was talking about. Then the realization dawned on me -- a red dawn, foreboding of horrors and all the cosmic dread of a Lovecraftian beast. When I had told her to “right-click” on the document, she’d interpreted the “right” as being spelled “w-r-i-t-e.” She’d spelled out the word “click.”

And in doing so, DELETED THE ENTIRE GRANT. All 300 pages of it.

My heartbeat quickened, bashing against my sternum like an enraged gorilla. The air became thick, and my lungs felt too weak to inhale. I felt my blood curdle, my complexion whiten, and for some reason the ghosts of invisible hands clenched around my throat.

I just made a retired professor delete an entire grant application. I might have just cost an entire department of one of the biggest universities in New England thousands of dollars.

How many thousands? I thought to myself. I had no idea how grants worked -- I was just a lowly Master of Arts candidate. \$10,000? \$100,000? *Do grants go up to a million dollars? Did I just lose a whole department a million dollars?*

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Panic set in. Real panic. I mean, there's your average everyday IT panic when some belligerent, drunk frat bro calls the helpline at midnight and demands that we restore his unsaved *Call of Duty* game. That's not even panic -- it's just intensified discomfort. This was a whole new, transcendent level of panic. This was pure, distilled terror.

"Are you still there?" the client asked.

"Y-yeah," my voice was cracking. I went through all of the logical fixes for the issue -- simple fixes, all of which I was terrified she would never understand. I allowed my body to shudder from head to toe, trying to shed the fear from me like a snake molting its skin. Unfortunately for me, at that moment I was not a snake.

"Okay," I said, trying to compose myself. "So, we have to undo what you just did."

"Alright," she replied. As if this was all part of the process. Inside, I was screaming: *Of all the clients in all the departments in all the colleges of the world -- WHY DID I HAVE TO GET THIS ONE?!*

"So...remember that Ctrl + A thing we did before?"

"Yes, I do," she said.

"Okay, we want to do the same thing, but this time you're going to hit Ctrl + Z." Translation: *Undo*. Also translation: *Fix this new problem we've created*. Also also translation: *OH MY GOD I'M GOING TO GET FIRED AND KICKED OUT OF MY GRADUATE PROGRAM AND MAYBE SUED FOR A MILLION DOLLARS OF LOST GRANT MONEY IF YOU DON'T FIX THIS RIGHT-QUICK-NOW!*

"Alright, I'm going to try that," she said, hesitant. A pit opened where my heart should have been. I felt my chest imploding, dreading that she might make things worse.

"Well, now the 'k' is gone in 'click.' I just says c-l-i-c."

Oh my God, I thought to myself, *she did it right!* Like a drowning man feeling the grip of a hand on my collar, I dared to hope. "Okay...that's good...do that again!"

"Now it's c-l-i."

"Yes, do it again!" *Dear Lords of Kobol, SAVE ME!* It was hard for me to not actually vocalize that last part.

"Now it's c-l. Are you sure this is working?"

"Yes! Definitely! Do it again!" *Don't give up on me now...*

"And now it's just a c."

I didn't let her argue. I just coughed out, vainly clutching for breath, "Again." *This is it...*

"Oh! The document's back!"

I put my hand over the receiver, held it far away from my face, and howled a blasting cry of victory at the low, cardboard-tiled ceiling of my windowless basement office.

I can't fully recall what happened after that. Something about one of her graduate interns walking into the office and fixing it. For all I can remember, she could have dropped dead on the other side of the line, and I could have just hung up on her. All I know is that when finally the clock on my phone stopped -- at just under 1 hour, 24 minutes -- the grant had been resurrected, and still existed somewhere on her desktop.

My fingers were shivering, though the air in my little box felt stifling and thick. The woman from the next office down was peaking through the crack in my door to make sure the scream she'd heard wasn't someone having a heart attack.

I tried to get back into my shift, but five minutes after hanging up, the pit in my heart had lowered to my stomach, and the world was turning a delirious hue of yellow. I stumbled out of the office, and up the stairs to the bulkhead of the administrative building.

Emerging into the cool spring air, I let gravity carry me to the bottom of the wide stone steps. Three undergraduates in their North Face uniforms were staring at me warily, as I threw myself to the ground and wretched at least two meals worth of puke onto the cold grass of the front lawn.

Thanks for reading!

WANTED: Non-Native Invasive Plants!

by the students of Bradley's R&S

In our Research & Service class this semester, called "Mapping & Managing Invasive Plants," our class has been working on identifying every plant on our campus and putting them into a digital GIS (Geographic Information Systems) landscaping map. This week, we marked all of the non-native invasive plants on our property with blue flagging, and Bradley did a tour of the property with the Building & Grounds Committee to ask for their approval to remove these invasive plants. Approval was granted, and so beginning next week, you will start to see these plants disappear from our campus. The plants we will be removing include Japanese barberry, burning bush, and buckthorn (see photos included with this article). Bradley will take the cut plant materials to the McNeil generating plant in Burlington where they will be burned to make electricity.

Non-native invasive plants do not necessarily cause a problem here on our own property. However, when birds eat the berries of these plants, the seeds are able to pass unharmed through the digestive tracts of the birds, and they are deposited wherever the birds defecate. This could be on the property of one of our neighbors, such as Shelburne Farms or the UVM Horticultural Farm right next door. In these places where invasives can grow freely without management, they have the ability to outcompete native plants and over time grow to dominate an ecosystem. In addition, non-native plants typically have no native predators (insects and other herbivores) to keep them in check. Shelburne Farms currently has an enormous problem with buckthorn dominating its forest ecosystems, and just yesterday we spent two hours flagging invasive plants at the UVM Horticultural Farm. Part of our R&S class will include removing these invasives from the UVM property over the coming weeks.

A follow up Research & Service class taught by Bradley in the spring will be researching native plants that we can use to replace the invasive plants we will be removing this semester. Another project that our class will be starting soon is the reconstruction of the stone wall outside the student entrance of the school. Adrian, Katya and Liam created a 3D digital site plan of this area which was also approved (with some small modifications) by the Building & Grounds Committee. After the stone wall has been reconstructed, Bradley's spring R&S class will be turning this area into a "demonstration garden" of native plants that will attract birds and butterflies. The garden will include a small seating area for students and faculty.

By the way, if you are a student or parent who knows of a source for native plants (perennials, shrubs and small trees) here in Vermont, we would appreciate if you could contact Bradley and let him know! His email is bmaterick@vermontcommons.org.



World Language Scavenger Hunt! Friday, November 21st

On Friday, November 21st the World Language Department will be holding a Scavenger Hunt in downtown Burlington. For this event, we divide the school in 4 different teams: The Hawksbills, The Snappers, The Leatherbacks and The Galapagos Giants.

The point of the Scavenger Hunt is to find the clues that Dispatchers tell to the Field Captains. The field captains organize the rest of the students in the group to go and look for the clues they are given. The dispatchers stay at VCS and can only talk in Spanish or Chinese to their groups; no English is allowed. Teachers monitor that they in fact follow this rule. At the end, the teams that solved most clues, wins! There will be prizes for the first and second place.

This is a fun and good way to practice the foreign language that they are studying and gather all the information they have about cultural topics that they may have seen in class. It also embodies our principle of moving out of the classroom and into the world. For those reasons, we expect every single student to participate. Even if your student is waived for foreign languages, we want him/her to be part of this experience. This event would be held rain or shine.

Overview of the day

- 8.30 1st period class
- 9.30 Morning meeting
- 9.50 2nd period class
- 10.50 3rd period class
- 11.45 Lunch starts
- 12.00 Students get in buses/cars.
- 12.20 Arrive in downtown Burlington. Scavenger Hunt starts.
- 2.40 Scavenger Hunt is over. Drive back to VCS.
- 3.00 Arrive at VCS and tally results.
- 3.20 Announce results and give out prizes.
- 3.30 Pick-up

Lunch

Since students will have a short period to eat their lunch, we ask not to bring anything that requires to be warmed up in the microwave to avoid lines and delays in the kitchen.

Transportation

Students will be transported to downtown in the school buses, as well as in parents and teachers' vehicles. Students will be brought back to VCS in the same vehicle they came in. Jill would have a copy of who is going in which vehicle. **We're looking for a few additional drivers to help us transport our students from school to town and back. We'll be leaving school at 12:00 and returning at 3:00. Please contact Chance if you can help.**

Supervision

Faculty members and other parent volunteers will be "roamers". Some of them will be walking up and down church Street and others will be permanently in specific locations. Students will know these locations. Students will be scattered throughout Church St., but they will always be with at least another peer. There will be limits where students can be "roaming". We are not setting up any "clues" further than Pearl St., Church Street, Main

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St. and South Winooski Ave.

Technology

All faculty and drivers will have cellphones where they can be reached. Students can, and actually should, bring their cellphones.

Student's pick up

Regular pick -up at school.

Additionally, as we prepare the logistics for the event, it is very helpful to know about any students that will not be attending. If you know your child will be absent that day, or will not be participating in the event for any reason, **please notify Chance as soon as you can.**

We hope that this is a wonderful, fun event as it was last year. Please let Adriana know if you have any questions about this.



Big Trips Fundraiser - Book Fair at Phoenix Books

Help Vermont Commons School Students raise money for their trips to Yellowstone National Park, China, and England!

From **November 15th to the 21st**, shop at either the Burlington or Essex branch of Phoenix Books, an independent book, toy, and gift store. If you mention Vermont Commons School to the cashier, 20% of your purchase will go towards funding our Big Trips Program!

We will be kicking off the book fair on Saturday, November 15th. From 10 am to 3 pm, VCS students will be at the Burlington branch for an open house, offering baked goods, hot drinks, as well as activities and crafts for children.

Get your holiday shopping done early, help students engage with the world, and support a great local bookstore!

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