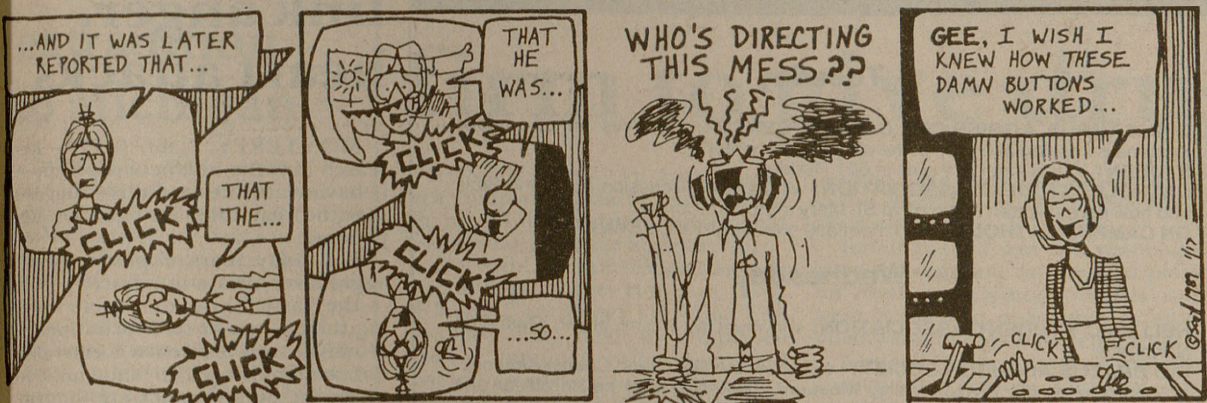


Warped

by Scott McCullar



Waldo

by Kevin Thomas



Judge educates defendants on academic side of living

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Students who cut class at Miriam Waltzer's school could end up behind bars.

"The choice is clear — learn or go to jail," said Waltzer, a criminal court judge who got tired of seeing young defendants who couldn't read the legal paperwork in front of them.

Her solution: turn her courtroom into a classroom.

"What I noticed was that the defendants got younger and younger and less and less educated," the judge said. "I realized that I had the power to put them on probation and make education part of the terms of that probation."

Since most had been expelled from school, she couldn't send them back there.

So Waltzer started what she calls the Probation Education Program with classes in her courtroom run by volunteer tutors. The program, which she supervises, started in May

and now has an enrollment of two dozen students, ages 17 to 27.

Before the students tackle their first assignment, each is tested to determine how much he or she knows.

"Most of these people dropped out of school in about the ninth grade, but what we've found is that most of them are on a second or third grade level academically," Waltzer said.

Once class starts, the rules are simple: Study and don't cut class.

One unexcused absence means a weekend in jail, two and the student is off probation and in prison. For those who stay out of trouble, the five years' probation ends as soon as the student earns a high school diploma.

"It's tough, that lady doesn't let you slip up," said Charles Carter, 26, who has been a student in the program from the beginning. "Sometimes you've been working and you're tired and you don't want to

come, but you have to. I like it, though. I like the reading, anyway. I don't like the division and English, but I'm learning it too."

Carter, convicted of drug possession, said he hopes to get his diploma this spring and enter barber school.

Roosevelt Thomas, 21, convicted of carrying a concealed weapon, said he would like to go to college and perhaps become a lawyer.

"That's what my mama wanted me to be," he said. "I got a lot of court experience already."

Cat returns from walk 8 years later

BANCROFT, Wis. (AP) — After eight years of unknown adventures, Clem the cat returned to its original owners.

"I heard some meowing out on the front porch last Friday," Kurt Helminiak said. "When I opened the door, there stood a big, long-haired, gray male cat."

"He walked into the house, checked it out for a few minutes, then he purred and jumped up onto his favorite chair like he had never been gone."

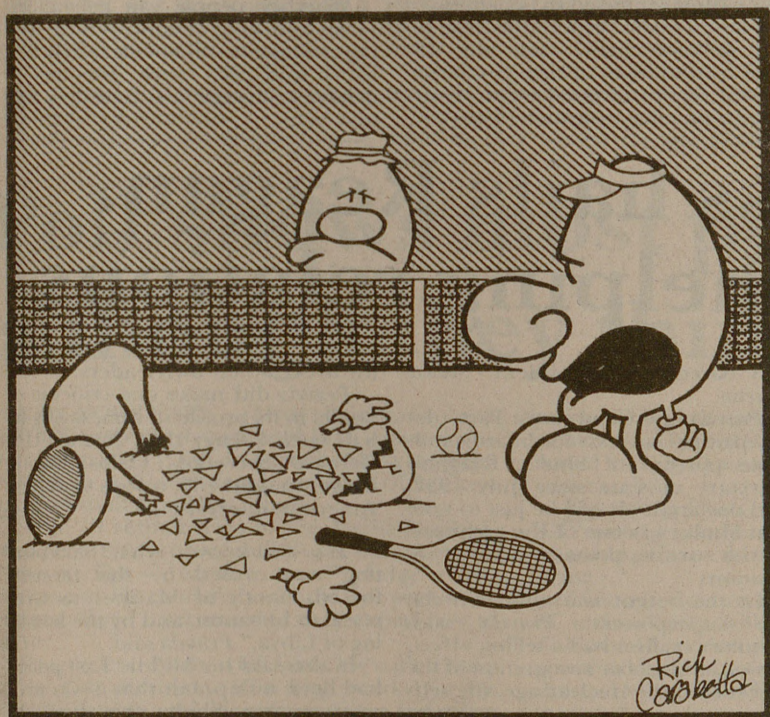
Helminiak said his family were incredulous at first, but he and his wife, Julie, compared the cat to pictures they had taken eight years earlier and confirmed Clem had come home.

"I let him out one cold night, when it was about 20 below zero, and snowing and blowing, and he never came back," he said.

The family searched for Clem throughout the neighborhood and listed him as a missing cat with the Humane Society. They also put up posters in stores, but the cat was never found.

Clem is healthy, though a bit mangier. Another difference is that Clem is now declawed, an indication that someone had taken care of it at least part of the time, Helminiak said.

"He's so glad to be home that he won't even go outside now," he said.



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